

WASHINGTON HERITAGE REGISTER

A) Identification

Historic Name: **Denny-Blaine Park**
Other Names: Denny-Blaine Beach; Whitman Place; Dykekiki Beach
Address: 200 E Lake Washington Blvd
City: Seattle County: King

B) Site Access (describe site access, restrictions, etc.)

Denny Blaine Park is owned and managed by the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department. It is open to the public from 6am-10:00pm every day. It is on Lake Washington Blvd in Seattle and is accessible by car, bike, and public transit.

C) Property owner(s), Address and Zip

Name: Seattle Parks & Recreation Dept.
Address: 100 Dexter Ave N
City: Seattle State: WA Zip: 98109

D) Legal boundary description and boundary justification

Tax No./Parcel: None
Boundary Justification: Park encompasses land from Lake Washington Blvd to the shore of Lake Washington at the junction of 40th Ave E.

FORM PREPARED BY

Name: Colleen Kimseylove (Edited by DAHP Staff)
Address: 411 E Thomas St
City / State / Zip: Seattle, WA 98102 Phone: 360.326.5573
Email: Colleen.kimsey@gmail.com Nomination Date: July 2025

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E) Category of Property (Choose One)

- ☐ building ☐ structure (irrigation system, bridge, etc.) ☐ district
- ☐ object (statue, grave marker, vessel, etc.) ☐ cemetery/burial site
- ☒ historic site (site of an important event) ☐ archaeological site
- ☐ traditional cultural property (spiritual or creation site, etc.)
- ☒ cultural landscape (habitation, agricultural, industrial, recreational, etc.)

F) Area of Significance – Check as many as apply

- ☐ The property belongs to the early settlement, commercial development, or original native occupation of a community or region.
- ☒ The property is directly connected to a movement, organization, institution, religion, or club which served as a focal point for a community or group.
- ☒ The property is directly connected to specific activities or events which had a lasting impact on the community or region.
- ☐ The property is associated with legends, spiritual or religious practices, or life ways which are uniquely related to a piece of land or to a natural feature.
- ☐ The property displays strong patterns of land use or alterations of the environment which occurred during the historic period (cultivation, landscaping, industry, mining, irrigation, recreation).
- ☐ The property is directly associated with an individual who made an important contribution to a community or to a group of people.
- ☒ The property has strong artistic, architectural or engineering qualities, or displays unusual materials or craftwork belonging to a historic era.
- ☐ The property was designed or built by an influential architect, or reflects the work of an important artisan.
- ☐ Archaeological investigation of the property has or will increase our understanding of past cultures or life ways.

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G) Property Description

Denny-Blaine Park (sometimes referred to as Denny Blaine Beach) is located on the western shore of Lake Washington, where historic Lake Washington Boulevard turns inland towards Washington Park Arboretum. Located at the edge of the Denny-Blaine neighborhood of Seattle, the park is approximately 2 acres. With picturesque views of Bellevue directly across Lake Washington and views to Mount Rainier in the distance, the park is primarily used for picnicking, sunbathing, and swimming.

The park area consists of three tiers, in addition to a grassy area within the oval loop of E. Denny Blaine Place. The upper level between the parking lot and the original embankment is grass covered and has several large deciduous and evergreen trees that provide shade. The middle level, between the lake-side base of the embankment and the beach area, is also grass. The lower lake level encompasses a sandy beach area with a rocky shoreline that is covered with small, smooth pebbles extending the first few feet into the lake.

The original plat drawing depicts a shoreline "esplanade" along an embankment, located at the end of a wide turnaround that formed an open space loop in the middle. The drawing also appears to depict a fountain within the oval area, however this was never installed. The embankment (as drawn in the plat) was already under construction - and likely completed in 1900, a year before the plat was filed; with a pier also being built that year or shortly thereafter (no later than May, 1903). Additional features at that time evidently included a boat facility, an oval-shaped lagoon with narrow passage to the lake, a small rustic shelter, and paths, lawn, and landscaping.

In 1917, the water level of Lake Washington was dropped by 9 feet after the Montlake Cut connected Lake Washington to South Lake Union. This left the embankment at Denny-Blaine Park "high and dry" and today it boasts a gently sloping beach. The embankment remains today as a reminder of the original shoreline, and the beach area is reached via the two sets of stairs that had been built into the wall (originally accessing the water directly).

H) Significance

Denny-Blaine Park, originally known as Whitman Place, is historically significant for its direct connection to outdoor recreational development of Seattle, and to the counter-culture community of the late 20th century. More recently it has a direct connection to the queer community of Seattle. Developed as a public space, the park has a long and vivid history as a location of conflict between nearby local residents and visitors from other parts of the city. Platted as part of the Denny-Blaine-Lake Park subdivision in 1901, from its early years, for some, the park has been seen as more of a private park for the surrounding residents, despite having been given to the city by the developers for public use shortly after the subdivision was platted. The main source of conflict revolves around its history as an unofficial “clothing optional” beach.

Due to the relative geographic isolation of the park within the city and the privacy afforded by its terraced landscape, its use by “outsiders” has been a contentious topic since its inception. In the early 20th century, reportedly neighbors tried to keep Black residents from the nearby Central District from visiting the park by putting up signs at the park. In the 21st century, it’s LGBTQ+ users have faced various attempts to be driven out of the park by nearby neighbors.

The area surrounding the park was developed just after the turn of the 20th century by Elbert F. Blaine (an attorney and former Seattle Parks Commissioner), and Charles L. Denny (son of Seattle founders Arthur Denny and Mary Denny). Their Denny-Blaine-Lake Park Tract, which was platted to follow the contours of the natural topography, attracted some of Seattle’s more elite families to build homes in the area. The sloped land had outstanding views and access to Lake Washington; and was conveniently located at the end of a newly built trolley line. It was here that Blaine and Denny built an elaborate real estate sales office, designed by noted architect Ellsworth Story. Often confused with the nominated Denny-Blaine Park, the site of the realty office was later converted into an open-air picnic shelter and boasts a sign that reads “Denny Blaine Lake Park”.

Within the development tract, Denny and Blaine included several parks and/or open spaces. These included the Stevens Park (now Stevens Triangle), Children’s Park (now called Howell Park), Viretta Park (named in honor of the wife of Charles Denny), the Menora Fountain (named in honor of the wife of Elbert Blaine and now called Denny-Blaine Lake Park), and Whitman Place (now called Denny Blaine Park, hyphen removed by Parks Dept in the 1970s).

Whitman Place, may have been named in honor of the late poet Walt Whitman, but

most people believe it was more likely named to honor the pioneer missionaries - Dr. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. However no specific records have been found which confirm the original name. The name Whitman Place (at .183 acres) was retained until at least 1917 when it appears on multiple lists of park assets. However, by 1912 it was often grouped with various other parks in the development tract which were collectively called Denny-Blaine Park (at 2.65 acres).

Platted as a turnaround area with a fountain in the green area, the land to the east fronted Lake Washington. Initial plans show a tiered shoreline with a rounded bulkhead. Images from the Seattle Municipal archives show construction activity at the park in 1903. The bulkhead allowed for an easy boat launch and landing spot for non-motorized watercraft. Other improvements included a small rustic shelter, paths, lawn, and landscaping. However, due to the completion of the Montlake Cut which connected Lake Washington and Lake Union in 1917, Lake Washington was lowered by 9' which left the boat landing at Denny-Blaine Park "high and dry." The end result was a sloping sand and small pebble beach.

Confusion over the name of the park continued into the teens most likely due the fact that many of the streets in the area had different names as they spanned between various sub-divisions. In 1918 the City Council endeavored to clarify the confusion of names for streets that crossed multiple subdivisions (prompted by additional annexations that had just taken place). Fronting the park, the main road had two names, Stixrud Drive and 40th Avenue, which was changed to Lake Washington Blvd. The loop going into the park was changed to Denny-Blaine Place and the park was renamed Denny-Blaine Park (or on some maps Denny-Blaine Place Park). The "new" name was not confusing for locals until 1961 when Minerva Fountain (the location of the former Denny Blaine Real Estate Office and trolley stop) was "renamed" Denny-Blaine Lake Park.

In the meantime, during the 1920s and 1930s the surrounding lots were built out and the density of the neighborhood increased. Many fine homes were built in its hills, and it continued to attract some of Seattle's wealthier families. However, by then the park was beginning to show signs of its age. Portions of the bulkhead were crumbling and were in disrepair, and the Parks Department's lack of funds to maintain their vast array of holdings was beginning to show. Reportedly, adjacent neighbor, Harry F. Ostrander, donated materials to repair the bulkhead.

Over the years the beach and park continued to be a popular place for the neighborhoods to swim, and it increasingly attracted youth from some distance. Since there was no bathhouse or lifeguard, boys openly changed clothes. Displeased, reportedly Mrs. Ostrander had her gardener commissioned as a policeman - he happened to arrest a fellow neighbor, the noted architect Ellsworth Story (date unknown).

The increased use of the beach from those outside of the neighborhood, also prompted the Ostrander's and other near-by neighbors ("a veritable 'who's who' of Old Seattle") to file a complaint with the Seattle Parks Board. In a letter to the

Seattle Park Board they protested unruly behavior in the park noting "there was an element of young people from 'Coon Hollow' who ... come down there and change their clothes right in the open".

To curtail use, the neighbors urged the Board to declare that bathing be prohibited at the beach since they did not have any funds to provide a lifeguard. They even provided a sketch for a proposed sign that stated, "*NO SWIMMING OR PICNICING (Parks Dept.) / Violators will be arrested*" and listed names of alternate parks - "*Madison Public Beach (1 mile) / Madrona Public Beach (1 mile)*". However, the Park Superintendent rejected posting of the sign and refused to disallow public bathing. A similar request to the board had also come in from neighbors of Madrona Park, which was also rejected.

The modesty of the 1930s is reflective of a letter sent to the Parks Board by O. H. Lindstedt, manager of sporting goods at University Book Store, on May 1, 1934; albeit he was on the other side of the issue. Lindstedt requested that the parks board stop requiring men to wear body bathing suits at public beaches. He noted that a majority of his male customers were just buying trunks, and thus were forced to avoid lifeguarded beaches so they could swim in their new suits. Lindstedt's concern was that his clients were swimming in places that were dangerous or at least unprotected. Denny-Blaine Park, was once such place where men illegally swam and sunbathed topless in the 1930s.

While use of the park by "outsiders" likely continued, it appears that requests by the neighbors waned for another 40+ years. Reportedly in the 1970s, women began to sunbath topless at Denny-Blaine Park. These women, who predominantly identified as lesbian, referred to the park as Dykekiki Beach (a playful combination of the words Dyke and Waikiki Beach). News reports from the period include accounts that feminist groups on the beach were "fairly aggressive" in chasing other groups out of the park, including "men who come to the park to ogle".

Concern over exposed skin at the park arose again in the 1980s. The earliest verified arrest may be that of Cappy Kitz, who on June 18, 1982, was cited for being topless while sunbathing, a criminal misdemeanor at the time. While a Seattle jury found her guilty of lewd conduct, the fact that she was a lesbian did not come out in court. In fact, the idea that Denny-Blaine Park was considered a "nude beach" was an open secret. In her July 12, 1985, article Seattle Times author Marsha King reported that the summer heat had brought a crowd of topless women to the beach. The article noted that Denny-Blaine Park beach was one of several other nude beaches in and around Seattle.

Prior to 1990, the Seattle Police Department would periodically issue citations under a then-current lewd conduct ordinance (City of Seattle 12A.10.070). However, many continued with their top-free or even naked usage as a form of self-expression and/or protest. During a six-week crackdown in the summer of 1988 they cited 17 different women for lewd conduct. In 1988, an article titled "The Cops

and The Tops,” the Seattle Weekly reported that police had cited nude sunbathers at Denny-Blaine beach for “lewd conduct” for the second year in a row. “For many women, it’s a matter of pride, and of gender politics, so they have continued to swim shirtless despite the tickets and the police patrols,” the reported noted.

In the 1980s the park was openly used by the LGBTQ+ community. In 1986 it served as host for the “Swim for Liberty” celebration. The shoreline activities centered on the park serving as ending point for a swimming competition from Medina Beach in Bellevue to Denny-Blaine Park. The event raised funds to help support the *No on Initiative 490 Campaign* (An initiative that would have allowed workplace discrimination by prohibiting persons “hereby declared as sexually deviant including homosexuals”), and helped send gay and lesbian athletes to the Gay Games II in San Francisco. Two years later it was host to the opening swim event for the Northwest Gay/Lesbian Sports Festival.

In 1990 following a ruling against them in *Seattle v. Johnson* the city dropped the lewd conduct ordinance. Simply being top-free or even fully naked in public was no longer illegal conduct — despite the frustrations that are periodically expressed through neighborhood community associations or via direct calls to the police.

Since then, clothing optional use at Denny Blaine Park has become more diverse across gender and sexual orientation. Since the mid-2010s, the park has continued to grow in popularity, including a substantial increase by Seattle's transgender community, especially in the years following the COVID lockdown. On warm summer days, it is not uncommon for all three tiers of the park to be fully utilized.

A recent complaint in 2023 brought the issue of nude sunbathing back to the forefront again. After adjacent property owner Stuart Sloan complained directly to Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell, he committed to donate “\$1 million in 'private funds'” for improvements to the park which included a children’s playground structure. Such installation would trigger increased oversight in the park and ostensibly curb nudity at the beach.

However, the proposed play area generated a strong outcry from the LGBTQIA+ community and others who valued continued clothing-optional use at the park. An overflow crowd of around 400 people attended a Seattle Parks and Recreation Board meeting on December 6, 2023. The community strongly voiced their opposition to a proposed children's play area and spoke about how significant Denny-Blaine Park was — as a queer and trans-friendly clothing optional park and beach, with many sharing poignant and personal testimonies.

The response also included creating a **Save Denny Blaine!** informational website; a petition to *Halt the Construction of a Children's Play Area at Denny Blaine Park* that received over 9,000 signatures; and a Save Denny Blaine website page to contact elected officials. In response, two days later the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department announced the proposed play area project would not

proceed, citing the feedback they received about the cohesion the current park usage brought to the LGBTQIA+ community.

While Denny Blaine Park is not officially designated by the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department as a clothing optional park, it is recognized that it has been used as such, especially by the queer community, for over 50 years. Today the park serves as a reminder of diversity of lifestyles throughout the city of Seattle and the various efforts by these communities to protect their shared experiences and places of importance.

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I) Documentation

Xerox and attach any information or evidence that supports the property's significance.

Written Sources (books, articles, newspapers):

Advertisement – The Denny-Blaine Park is Now on the Market” – Seattle Post Intelligencer, May 26, 1901.

“A Nude Awakening – The Warmth of Summer Temps Sunbathers to Bare all at Local Water Sport” – Seattle Times, July 12, 1985.

“A Question of Parks” – Seattle Times, December 27, 1905.

“Cautious nudists bare down: But bathing suits, tops are close at hand if law shows up for pinch” – The New Tribune, July 15, 1985.

“Denny-Blaine Swimming” – Seattle Times, July 29, 1964.

“Fundraising swim to Benefit PWAs” – Seattle Gay News, June 24, 1988.

“Madrona-Denny Blaine Club Elects” – Seattle Times, May 6, 1941.

“Nude sunbathers at Seattle Park trouble nearby residents” – Seattle Times, August 20, 2016.

“Nude sunbathing: when you take it off, watch behind you” – The Olympian, July 14, 1985.

“Nudists seeking place in the sun” – The Columbian, July 15, 1985.

“Police Ticket Topless Sunbathers in Park” – Seattle Times, August 11, 1988.

“Playground at nide beach? Seattle project drawing wide opposition” – Seattle Times, November 23, 2023.

“Seattle Neighborhoods: Denny-Blaine” — Thumbnail History - By Junius Rochester
Posted 2/19/2001 HistoryLink.org Essay 2996

“Seattle Park System Extensive” – Seattle Times, March 3, 1912.

“Swim for Liberty” – Seattle Gay News, June 20, 1986.

“Team Seattle will swim for Liberty... and prepare for Gay Games” – Seattle Gay News, July 4, 1986.

“Waiting Room Owned by City” – Seattle Times, July 2, 1941.

“Why Seattle Stills Needs To Create, Preserve LGBTQ+ Spaces” – Seattle Times, December 18, 2023.

“Women claim harassment by police at Denny Blaine; 17 cited” – Seattle Gay News, August 26, 1988.

“Women convicted for topless sunbathing” – Seattle Gay News, September 24, 1982.

Oral History/Interviews:

J) Map and Photographs

Attach copies of historic maps or photos if available, and current photos (min 5 x 7 digital images, 300 DPI). Include a current map – appropriate Google Earth/U.S.G.S. map and parcel map – with the location of the property and its boundaries clearly marked. (see instructions)



Google Earth Map

Nomination Boundaries

Denny-Blaine Park

Seattle, WA



King County Assessor Map

Denny-Blaine Park
Seattle, WA

MAP OF

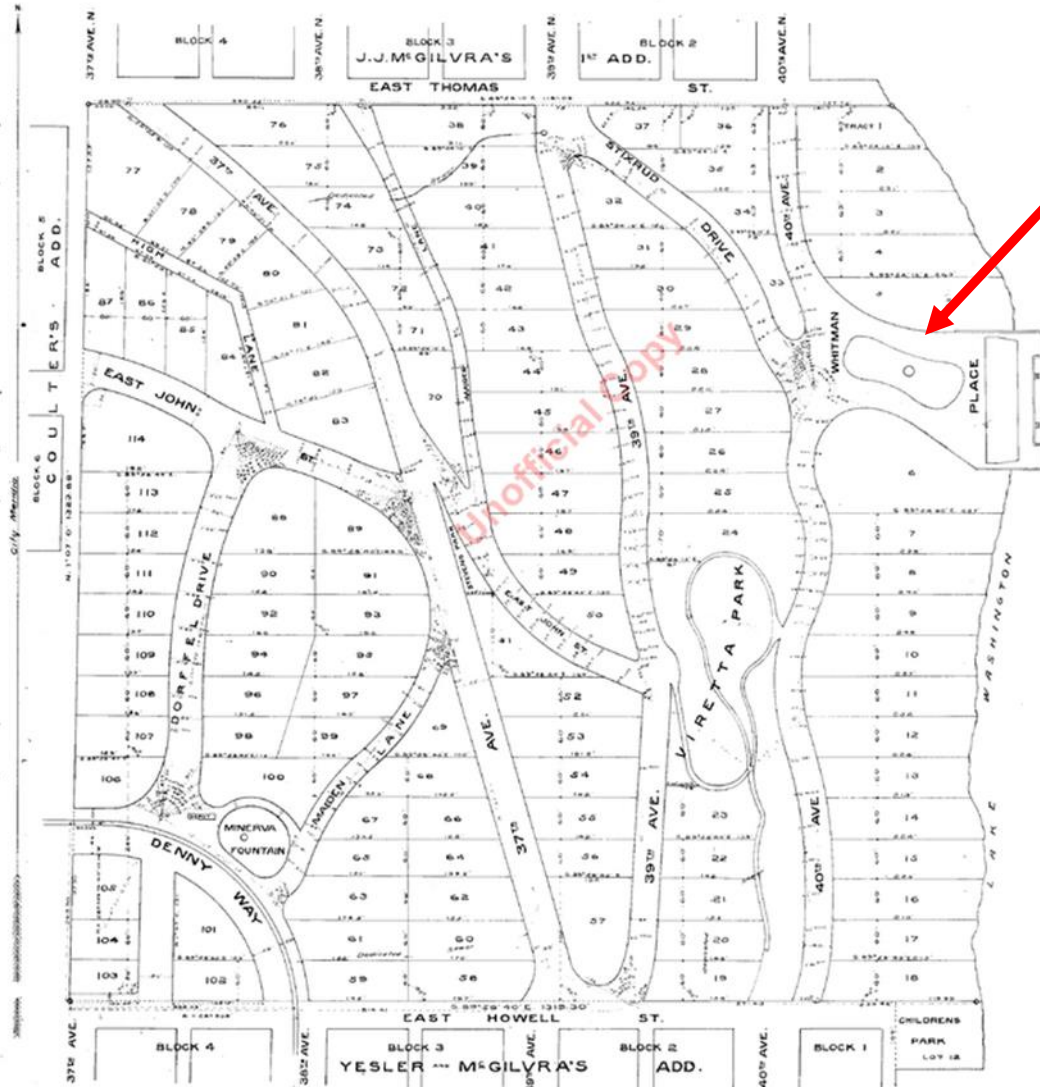
Denny-Blaine-Lake Park

TO THE
City of Seattle

KING COUNTY WASH.

SCALE 50 FT. = 1 IN.

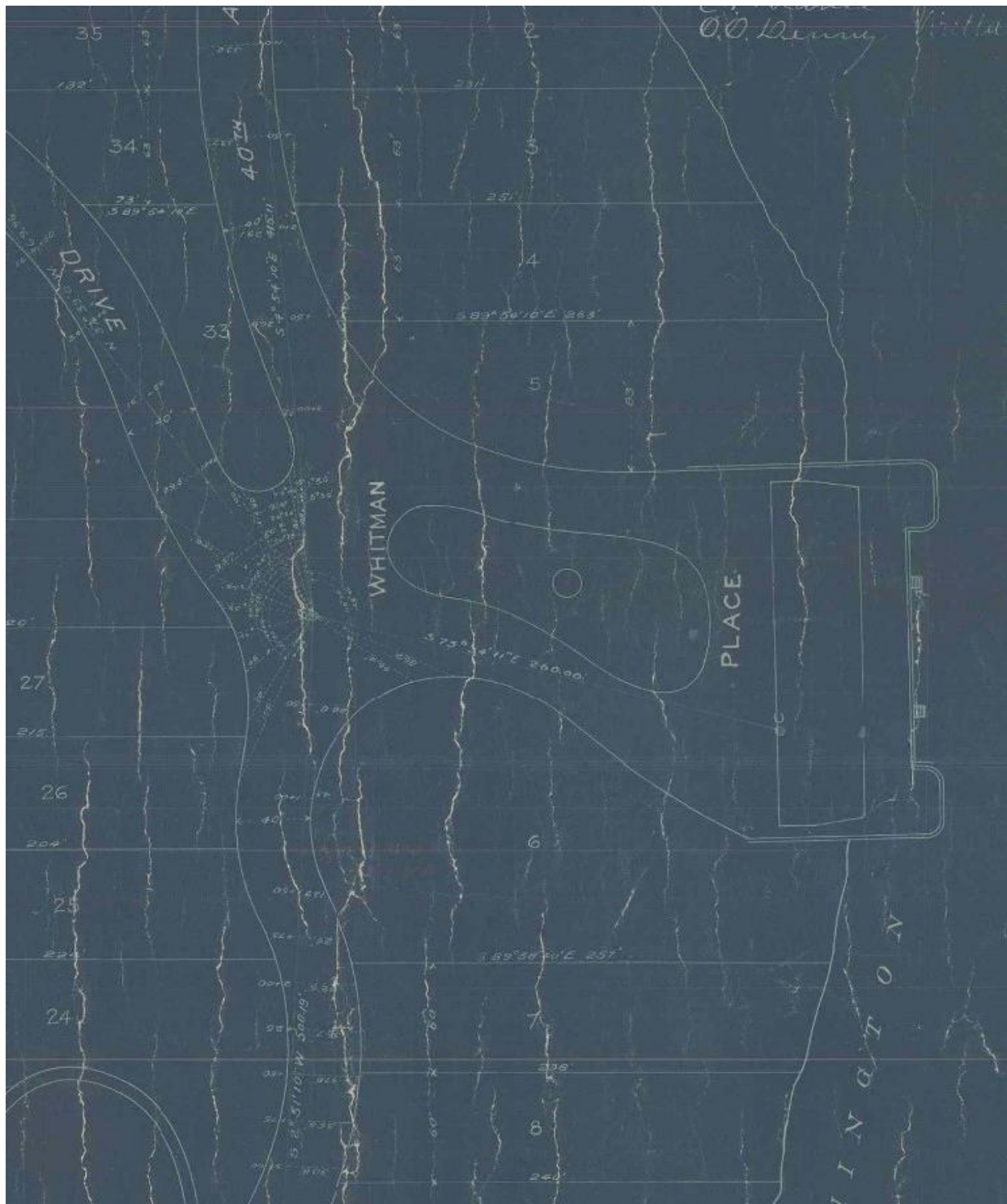
STIXRUD - NASTEN
ENGRS.



Denny-Blaine-Lake Park Plat Map

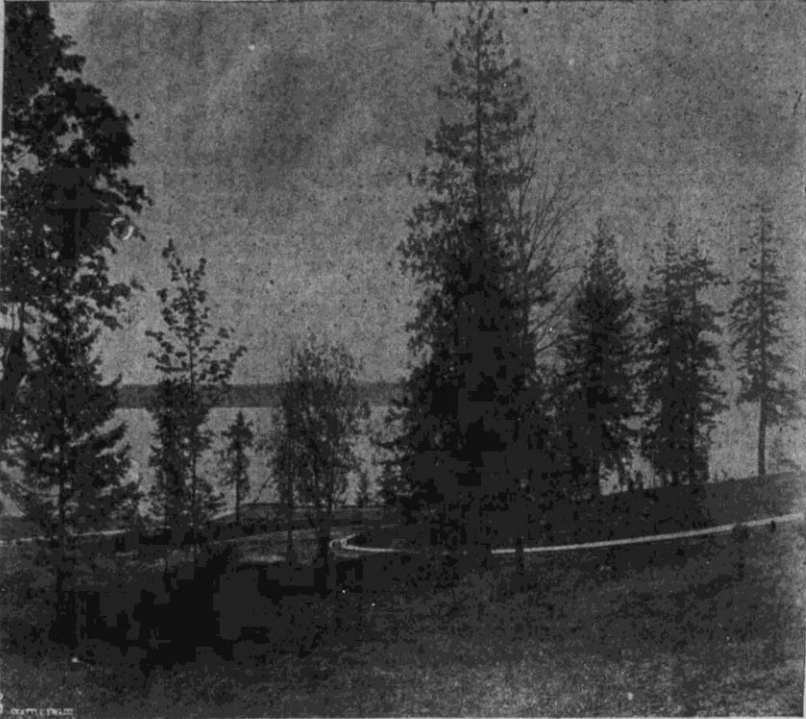
Stixrud - Nasten, Engineers - 1901

Seattle, WA



Plat Map (Detail of Whitman Place | Denny-Blaine Park) – April 15, 1901
Seattle Municipal Archives – Item # 407-21

Denny-Blaine Park – Historic Images



WHITMAN PLACE.

THE DENNY-BLAINE PARK
IS NOW ON THE MARKET.

Sales are being made and beautiful homes constructed. Take Madrona Park line and view the finest addition to any western city.

FOR SALE BY..... DENNY-BLAINE LAND COMPANY.

Advertisement for Denny-Blaine Park Tract showing image of Whitman Place.
Seattle Post Intelligencer – May 26, 1901.



Construction of embankment at Denny-Blaine Park, view looking north – 1903
Seattle Municipal Archives - #17250



View from boat on Lake Washington looking west – Denny-Blaine Park, May 30, 1903
Seattle Municipal Archives - #17621



View from boat on Lake Washington looking north – Denny-Blaine Park, May 1, 1903
Seattle Municipal Archives - #17228



869 - LAKE WASHINGTON, DENNY-BLAINE PARK, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
EDWARD H. MITCHELL. PUBLISHER, SAN FRANCISCO.

Colored Postcard – Denny-Blaine Park, c. 1910.
Note waterline - before lake water level were lowered.

WASHINGTON



The Associated Press

A topless bather tests the water at Denny Blaine Park in Seattle.

Nudists seeking place in the sun

SEATTLE (AP) — Last weekend was National Nude Weekend. But many practitioners of nudism find it difficult to let it all hang out.

Lewd conduct ordinances in many cities make it illegal to go naked in public, but sun enthusiasts find such havens as Wreck Beach at Vancouver, B.C., Oregon's Rooster Rock State Park, or Teddy Bear Cove near Bellingham, where public nudity either is legal or tolerated.

In Seattle, police say people occasionally are issued citations for taking it all off at public beaches around Lake Washington, but say the city's ordinance usually just makes nudists more careful.

Officer B.G. Wilson, who patrols the beach at Denny Blaine Park on Lake Washington, has heard complaints of nude sunbathing. "But naturally, when we come over the hill, they put their tops on. I told them last year that if I ever saw anybody nude, they would be cited."

Official and public reaction is mixed.

Rick Scheuer, a swimming beach manager at Magnuson Park on Lake Washington, said he had heard the park's secluded grasslands often are frequented by naked sunbathers.

Although he would call the police if there were complaints, Scheuer said, "Out of sight, out of mind. If I don't see it, I really can't do anything about it."

Park users, such as Carole Molitor, said she was not offended by the nude swimmers and tanners.

"I think if people go off by themselves, it's their business what they do," she said, adding that she would sunbathe on her deck, "but as sure as I take off my clothes, somebody comes to the door."

At least one neighbor near the Denny Blaine Park said she was not bothered by nudity at the beach.

"I don't think nudity bothers me," said Darlene Corkrum. "It's interesting that it's tolerated. I stayed for a time and enjoyed myself, but I finally left because there's a strained atmosphere down there."

In March, two Seattle residents won a \$110,000 settlement of a claim against the department for humiliation stemming from their 1982 arrest during a late night skinny-dip in Lake Washington. The couple claimed officers did not allow them to cover themselves when they were taken to the station for booking.



Denny-Blaine Swimming

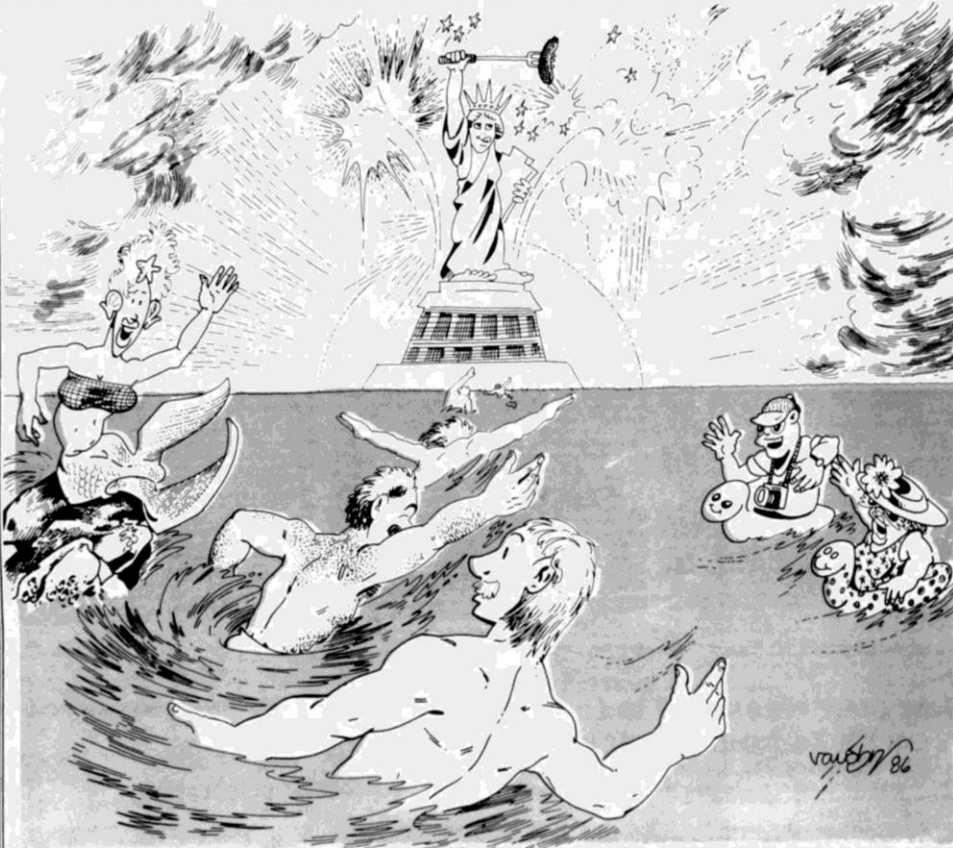
"Is the small beach at Denny-Blaine Park on Lake Washington a public beach? What facilities, such as floats and lifeguards, should it have? Will the grass be cut?"—Mrs. B.

Troubleshooter: The beach is not authorized as a bathing beach by the Seattle Park Department and no facilities are provided or planned because the beach is too small for efficient use. Park crews will check the grass and cut it if necessary, park officials say.

"Denny-Blaine Swimming"
Seattle Times — July 29, 1964.

"Nudist seeking place in the sun" - AP
The Columbian — Vancouver, WA July 15, 1988.

SWIM FOR LIBERTY



On Friday, the Fourth of July, 1986, our nation celebrates the 100th birthday of the Statue of Liberty. Here in Seattle, on the same day, a team of daring swimmers will swim across Lake Washington in an athletic demonstration supporting all the ideals Ms. Liberty symbolizes: freedom, justice and equality for all.

You're invited to be a part of this historic crossing without getting your feet wet. Join the shoreline festivities at Denny Blaine Beach as the swimmers arrive at approximately 11 am. Then join Team Seattle for a beach party, "All-American Weenie Roast" and fireworks show, co-hosted by Tacky Tourist Clubs of America.

Reserve your place in history by sending your contribution along with the reply card below. Your donation of \$25 today will help send Seattle's gay & lesbian athletes to Gay Games II this August, and also say YES to liberty . . . and NO to Initiative 490.* For more information phone at 323-2407.

Yes! I/we want to help Team Seattle SWIM FOR LIBERTY.

Enclosed is \$_____ for _____ person(s) at \$25 each. With each \$25 donation I/we also get a free Team Seattle T-Shirt and free admission to the Tacky Tourists' All American Weenie Roast. *All proceeds to benefit Team Seattle and No on 490.*

My/our T-Shirt size is _____ S _____ M _____ L _____ XL.

_____ I can't make the party, but here's my \$10 contribution to the SWIM FOR LIBERTY.

_____ I have a (motorized) escort boat available. Call me.

NAME _____

PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

ZIP _____

Please make checks payable to Team Seattle, 801 E. Harrison St. Suite 105, Seattle, WA 98102. Your name will be placed on a guest list for admission to the Weenie Roast at Maiden Lane Manor — 239 39th Avenue East — one block from Denny Blaine Park.



Swim for Liberty Flyer – Denny-Blaine Park
Seattle Gay News – June 20, 1986.

Denny-Blaine Park – Current Images









