Military Seattle: Fort Lawton in the City, 1895-1911

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Fort Lawton was an army post in Seattle from 1899 to 1972. Starting in 1895, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce lobbied the federal government to establish a military base and donated land near the Puget Sound, expecting it would bring thousands of soldiers and scores of business receipts. When the army failed to meet their expectations, and later when it stationed African American soldiers at the fort, Seattle's elite sought alternative ways to benefit from the post's presence. The army rejected a proposal to allow Fort Lawton to be incorporated into Seattle's park system in 1911. This thesis argues that Seattle's civic priorities, ambitions, and prejudices are reflected in how the city's urban regime interacted with the War Department regarding Fort Lawton from 1895 to 1911, illuminating competing notions of public space, who was included and excluded in the regime's conception of their city, and the evolving role of the federal government in the early twentieth century.

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INTRODUCTION

Discovery Park is Seattle's largest outdoor recreation area. Hundreds of acres of green space provide respite from the persistent hum of the entrepreneurial city. After parking in the south lot, visitors ascend a set of concrete stairs and stroll through a grove of rhododendron trees. Beyond the trees, they are greeted by a breathtaking vista. The blue waters of the Puget Sound and the majestic, white-capped Olympic Mountains frame a spacious rolling lawn of green grass. Families lay out blankets on the grass while dogs chase thrown balls. This is one of the rare locations in the city with a completely unobstructed view of the water and mountains. Only the orderly row of buildings that ring the lawn and a flagpole at its northern edge suggest to visitors that it was once the parade ground of an army post. The history of Fort Lawton, long closed and nearly forgotten in the churn of Seattle's relentless progress, contains lessons about the city's growth and how it defined itself during its most dynamic years.

This is a story about a failed partnership between a city and the military. Seattle's business community donated land to the federal government for an army post in their city, anticipating economic benefits. After a decade of unsuccessfully attempting to dictate who the army sent to Fort Lawton and how they used their post, the city tried to reclaim most of the donation for a park. Seattle's business-oriented ambitions for Fort Lawton were unsuccessful, and the military similarly did not succeed in their aspirations for the post. The army, focused on coastal defense and suppressing urban unrest in 1895 when they sought a new fort in the Puget Sound, did not receive the property that the Seattle Chamber of Commerce had promised. The final form of the donated land was smaller than agreed upon and lacked vital frontage on Salmon Bay. Just as the first buildings were erected on the new post site, the army's mission

fundamentally changed with the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. With overseas occupation and technological advances that necessitated larger military posts, Fort Lawton became an anachronistic and nearly useless federal reservation within twelve years of its opening in 1899. So, what can be learned about Seattle from an insignificant army fort? Primarily, Seattle's urban regime can be understood by examining its outer edges, where municipal interests clashed with the federal government's power regarding military forts.

Starting in 1895, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce lobbied the federal government to establish a military base in their city, donating 641 acres of land near the Puget Sound. The Chamber made significant efforts to persuade the army to construct a fort in Seattle, believing it would primarily benefit local businesses and elevate the prestige of their city. While public memory of the Chamber's effort emphasizes the gift of land to the federal government free of charge as an example of private enterprise contributing to the public good, the process by which the fort was established illuminated a more complex set of motivations. The army intended to establish a new fort in Seattle because it could address its priorities of coastal defense and rapid response to urban unrest. Meanwhile, the Chamber was ambivalent about how Fort Lawton contributed to national defense, as long as it generated increased profits for the city. The Chamber's eagerness to promise a plot of land on Magnolia Bluff, which they could not ultimately secure, led to a problematic outcome. The resulting army post had limited utility and would not bring the thousands of soldiers and increased profits the Chamber hoped for. By the time Fort Lawton hosted its first contingent of soldiers in 1900, the Seattle business community had its first inklings of buyer's remorse.

In 1909, Seattle's elite exhibited growing resentment towards the army when a regiment of African American soldiers was posted to Fort Lawton. A significant incident occurred when a

Black soldier was accused of attempting to rape a white woman in 1910, leading to a public outcry against the regiment that highlighted the state of race relations in Progressive Era Seattle. However, this incident contradicted the typical interactions between Black soldiers and urban areas during this time. President William Howard Taft resisted pressures to expel Black troops from Seattle, treating them as soldiers entitled to due process instead of as African Americans threatening the white social order. His cautious approach signified a departure from the harsher response of his predecessor, Theodore Roosevelt, who had discharged 167 Black soldiers from the army on dubious evidence following a 1906 shooting in Brownsville, Texas. Absent Taft's intervention on behalf of the soldiers, it is likely Seattle's elite would have successfully pushed the regiment out of their city. When given the latitude to conduct a thorough investigation, army officials concluded that the controversy had been intentionally sensationalized by real estate speculators eager to remove Black residents from the Interbay neighborhood in Seattle. Taft's decision to retain the regiment at Fort Lawton established clear distinctions between city limits and military post boundaries. While Seattle's elite tried to dictate who the army could station at Fort Lawton, the War Department made it clear that it would utilize the military facility as it deemed appropriate, irrespective of its impact on urban growth or social tensions.

The army downgraded Fort Lawton's primary mission to a small garrison of troops and a supply depot in 1908, which left half the reservation undeveloped. Subsequently, the Seattle city government hired landscape architect John C. Olmsted to propose a plan to extend the city's park system through the fort. The Olmsted Plan for Fort Lawton misjudged how the military perceived its posts by assuming that municipal priorities would be supported by the War Department. The army weighed military requirements against the Olmsted Plan and found them incompatible. By denying public uses for the post, the military limited how federal land would

be made available to local interests. The United States Army viewed Fort Lawton in zero-sum terms: the more it served the civic needs of the city, the less useful it became as a military facility. When the federal government finally turned over Fort Lawton to the city in 1972, the land was turned into Seattle's most popular park.

Fort Lawton was on the sidelines of the significant events that shaped the United States Army during the Progressive Era and would not make a good case study for understanding the organization in this period. Military historians would be better served by studying the writings of Emory Upton, the Elias Root reforms, and the army's first steps into a century dominated by overseas wars. However, it reveals a great deal about Seattle's character during the rapid urban development of the early twentieth century. In this thesis, I argue that Seattle's civic priorities, ambitions, and prejudices from 1895 to 1911 are reflected in how the city's urban regime interacted with the War Department regarding Fort Lawton, illuminating competing notions of public space, who the regime included and excluded in their city, and the evolving role of the federal government in the early twentieth century.

Seattle's Urban Regime

During the establishment and the first twelve years of Fort Lawton, the War Department interacted with numerous individuals and organizations that represented the interests of Seattle. The mayor and City Council occasionally appear in the archival record, but usually at the direction of other, more influential power centers. An expansive and fluid conception of a Seattle urban regime is necessary to understand how the city was governed and interacted with other entities. Further, the urban regime evolved from 1895 to 1911, shifting outlooks and priorities based on who was negotiating with the army and to what end.

The political scientist Clarence Stone, in seeking to understand Atlanta's relative success in relation to other Southern cities navigating the Civil Rights era, found that a strict focus on the elected leaders of the city would not adequately explain how the city performed better than its competitors in navigating complex social change. He found that a governing coalition of civic leaders and business interests in a symbiotic relationship was the key to Atlanta's success. Stone defined this urban regime as "the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions."[1] While other scholars would illuminate the real harm done in cities when business interests trump the welfare of urban dwellers, Stone's conception of urban regimes remains a pragmatic framework for understanding how Seattle's elite organized themselves and communicated their interests to the War Department regarding Fort Lawton.[2]

Seattle had been defined, since the arrival of the Denny Party of Euro-American settlers in 1851, by its business community. The town grew on the harvest of its natural resources. First, logging and then coal dominated the local economy until the railroads arrived and the docks were constructed. Local historians and scholars of Seattle have emphasized the importance of business interests in varied intensities. Some, like literary critic Roger Sale, narrate Seattle's growth as the product of an industrious spirit of civic duty shared by all.[3] Others, such as local historians Murray Morgan and William C. Speidel, paint a darker portrait of Seattle's growth. Their narratives portray the city's development as a morality play, where wealthy interests shape

[1] Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (University Press of Kansas, 1989), 6.
[2] See Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1996), Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton University Press, 2014), and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit : How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership (*University of North Carolina Press, 2019).
[3] Roger Sale, *Seattle: Past to Present* (University of Washington Press, 1976).

the urban form to their own ends.[4] More recent voices, like Coll Thrush, Matthew Klingle, and Megan Asaka, seek to illuminate that which economic progress had obscured: Indigenous peoples, the environment, and immigrant communities.[5]

The Seattle urban regime in 1896, when efforts to establish Fort Lawton began in earnest, was dominated by the Chamber of Commerce. It included old city luminaries, allies in Congress and the Governor's office, and merchants and contractors who could bid on the contracts a new army post could bring. The parks movement and an ambitious city engineer named R. H. Thomson would shift some power away from the Chamber towards civic functions, including the city's public works department and Park Commission. By 1910, neighborhood groups near Fort Lawton had enough sway to draft City Council resolutions and force a confrontation with President William Howard Taft.[6] While the urban regime in 1911 still contained a mixture of public and private interests, its orientation had been pulled more towards the formal structures of city government, particularly as the population increased and the Progressive Era expectations of good governance became more apparent.

Public Space

This thesis is about 641 acres of land on Magnolia Bluff in Seattle. Before the Chamber of Commerce offered it to the War Department for an army post, it was 641 acres. After it

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[4] Murray Morgan, *Skid Road: An Informal Portrait of Seattle*. Rev. ed. (Viking Press, 1962) and Bill Speidel, *Sons of the Profits : Or, There's No Business like Grow Business: The Seattle Story, 1851-1901* (Nettle Creek Publishing Company, 1967).

[5] Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (University of Washington Press, 2008), Matthew Klingle, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (Yale University Press, 2007), and Megan Asaka, *Seattle from the Margins : Exclusion, Erasure, and the Making of a Pacific Coast City* (University of Washington Press, 2022).

[6] The role and relative influence of neighborhood groups is explored by Ocean Howell in his analysis of the Mission District in San Francisco. See Ocean Howell, *Making the Mission: Planning and Ethnicity in San Francisco* (University of Chicago Press, 2015).

became a fort and led to friction between the city and the military, it remained 641 acres. The most significant change between 1896 and 1911 was ownership, and the primary source of friction between the Seattle urban regime and the War Department was the question of who had the authority to decide what happened on it.

Urban space is crafted by societies to serve a multitude of purposes.[7] How it is used by whom is a marker of what the city prioritizes. Seattle's origins and history up to 1895 reflected the significant influence of individual landowners and their businesses, a pattern observed throughout nineteenth-century America. Historians Elizabeth Blackmar and Terrence J. McDonald have shown how real estate valuations and the commodification of land were fundamental to American urban development.[8] Robin Einhorn further interrogated the line between private and public use through her analysis of pre-1871 public works taxes in Chicago.[9] Through most of the century, private interests dominated the tone and tenor of urban development.

Increased urbanization in the United States and the first serious planning efforts to alleviate the deficiencies of cities helped spark a process of strengthening municipal government at the expense of private property owners. As Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig illustrated in their book about the creation of Central Park, the parks movement was a major driver for setting aside public space for the use of all residents in cities.[10] By the dawn of the Twentieth century, the City

[7] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Blackwell Publishing, 1991).
[8] Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Cornell University Press, 1989) and Terrence J. McDonald, *The Parameters of Urban Fiscal Policy: Socioeconomic Change and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1860-1906* (University of California Press, 1986).
[9] Robin L. Einhorn, *Property Rules* (The University of Chicago Press, 1991).
[10] Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Cornell University Press, 1992).

Beautiful movement inspired many American cities, including Seattle, to conceive of urban planning on a comprehensive scale.[11]

The United States Army did not consider its forts to be public spaces. Fort Lawton, like its antecedents in military fortifications throughout American history, was intended to project federal power outward into the surrounding area, not absorb municipal priorities inward on its reservation. Particularly in the West, military posts were inkblots of security along transportation routes or in the vicinity of Indigenous groups that opposed encroachment on their traditional territory. Often, communities would grow underneath the security umbrella of army forts. Seattle, however, was well established by 1895 when it invited the army to establish Fort Lawton. Later, when the city proposed linking the fort to Seattle's system of parks and boulevards, army officials had foremost on their minds the military utility of their post. Many urban spaces can have multiple uses. City squares can be used for transportation, demonstrations, commerce, and recreation. Civic buildings can be utilized for administrative purposes, ceremonies, concerts, and art exhibits. Fort Lawton, however, was used solely for military force projection.

The Federal Government in the West

Despite lingering popular perception, the American West was not a wilderness to be settled by industrious Euro-Americans.[12] The federal government, through public policy and military action against Indigenous peoples, opened the West for settlers. Seattle, like other Western cities, was platted along lines drawn by the General Land Office long before 1851 when

[11] William H Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
[12] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W.W. Norton, 1991).

the Denny Party arrived. The federal government granted each land parcel to private parties. Seattle was founded and grew through the support of the federal government.

Richard White documents the role of the federal government in the settlement of the West and how it preceded the settlers who would occupy the land.[13] Further, Paul Frymer argues that the federal government recognized its limited capacity to control the lands it had acquired and used land grants and other measures to funnel settlers to preferred areas to advance government reach.[14] Instead of thinking of the West as a blank slate, Patricia Limerick believes a more fitting description of the region is a conquered territory with vestiges of the conflict imprinted on the land and the people living there.[15] The United States Army's principal mission from the end of the Civil War until the Spanish-American War was to provide a military presence in the West to secure new communities and eliminate Indigenous opposition.[16] Seattle's first decades did not feature a substantial federal presence in its vicinity; however, urban unrest and the vulnerability of the Puget Sound to attack from foreign powers drew the attention of military planners.

Seattle's elite saw the federal government as an enabler of their growth rather than as the source of their fortunes. The government provided the land for their city and the railroad easements that linked it to the national economy. The Army Corps of Engineers built a ship canal that linked its freshwater lakes to the Puget Sound, which would lead to a robust shipbuilding industry in the Twentieth century. When the Seattle business community donated the land to establish Fort Lawton, their expectation was that it too would serve their interests. It might have

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[13] Richard White, "*It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).
[14] Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton University Press, 2017).
[15] Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (Norton, 1988), 90.
[16] Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (Macmillan, 1973).

if the army had not suffered from strategic incoherence in the 1890s. With the Indian Wars over, the military struggled to define itself and its future purpose.[17] The War Department strove to reposition itself from frontier outposts to facilities more suitable to its perceived priorities of suppressing urban unrest and providing coastal defense. Fort Lawton could have been an ideal location for those tasks if the Spanish-American War and the modernization of the military had not reoriented the army towards overseas conflicts and larger bases. Coastal defense was later minimized in favor of a modernized navy capable of projecting American might beyond its shores. Domestic unrest was left to the civil authorities and the National Guard while regular troops occupied the Philippines, Guam, and other territories acquired in 1898. Increased range and effectiveness of rifles, machine guns, and artillery drove the War Department soon after the establishment of Fort Lawton to seek much larger tracts of land away from populated areas to prepare soldiers to maneuver and survive in industrialized warfare. War Department officials reimagined smaller forts, such as Lawton, as temporary staging areas for troops and supplies bound for overseas destinations. A brief moment when army forts and urban growth were closely linked had passed without Seattle being able to benefit from it.

Sources and Structure

The novelist W. E. B. Griffin wrote, "Napoleon was wrong. Armies don't travel on their stomachs. They slide along on paper."[18] Historically, successful armies had good logistics, but where the United States Army truly excelled in the late nineteenth century was in bureaucracy.

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[17] Perry D. Jamieson, *Crossing the Deadly Ground: United States Army Tactics, 1865-1899* (University of Alabama Press, 1994), Jerry M. Cooper, "The army's Search for a Mission, 1865-1890," in *Against All Enemies: Interpretations of American Military History from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Kenneth J. Hagan and William R. Roberts (Greenwood Press, 1986), 173-195, and Peter Karsten, "Armed Progressives: The Military Reorganizes for the American Century," in *Building the Organizational Society*, ed. Jerry Israel (The Free Press, 1972), 197-232.
[18] W. E. B. Griffin, *The Generals* (Jove, 1986), 273.

The key to understanding the interaction between the War Department and the City of Seattle lies in having adequate archival evidence to provide independent perspectives on how they viewed each other. The National Archives has preserved an impressive amount of the army's administrative minutiae. Despite the events in this narrative taking place during the most consequential restructuring of the War Department in a century, the organization never faltered in collecting and organizing reports, letters, internal deliberations, and policies regarding Fort Lawton. Conversely, the Seattle Municipal Archives retains many records of city governance from this period; however, the files of the eight mayors and dozens of city council members who served in an official capacity are lost. As a result, the army's perspective on Fort Lawton during the period of this study is disproportionately represented in the archival record. To understand the structure and views of the Seattle urban regime, the minutes of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, newspaper accounts, and the field notes of John C. Olmsted, among other sources, fill the gap.

The archival imbalance had to be addressed and compensated for. Otherwise, it would lead to an inaccurate portrayal of Fort Lawton's development that overweighs the army's views and interests. Similarly, the loss of official government correspondence could lead to assumptions that civic leadership was, in fact, leading the interactions with the War Department. I have tried to avoid both mistakes. Seattle's business leaders wrote to each other and their representatives in Congress about their disappointment in Fort Lawton. Where city records have been maintained--as in court transcripts, police reports, and the proceedings of the Park Commission--the influence of the Seattle urban regime is evident. The records also illustrate how contemporaneous newspaper accounts of events, particularly those sensationalized by interested actors, are often unreliable. The army kept every piece of correspondence regarding Fort Lawton

in the records of several bureaus of the War Department or of the regional headquarters at Vancouver Barracks. Not only is there little to show for official inquiries from civic leaders, but there are no oblique references to municipal government policies, opinions, or considerations that the army, Chamber of Commerce, or others felt obligated to respond to. The War Department interacted with Seattle's urban regime regarding Fort Lawton, not strictly the elected city government.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One traces the origin of Fort Lawton and the efforts of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to donate a plot of land on Magnolia Bluff for its establishment from 1895 to 1900. Chapter Two starts off in 1909 with the posting of the African American Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment at Fort Lawton and continues through the immense controversy in 1910 regarding the accusations of attempted rape by Private Nathaniel Bledser and subsequent investigations conducted by the War Department. Chapter Three returns to the first encroachments by the city on the Fort Lawton reservation in 1908 and the subsequent Olmsted Plan, which was rejected by the army in 1911. Throughout, we learn that Seattle was a business-dominated polity with a gradually strengthening civil administration, prone to discrimination against African Americans and other minorities as a matter of civic policy when tensions were inflamed by local voices and less concerned with national security than with the implementation of their city planning goals.

CHAPTER ONE

GREAT AND BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT: THE SEATTLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S CAMPAIGN TO ESTABLISH FORT LAWTON, 1895-1900

"I have always felt that the army post owed us something."[1]

Businessman Herman Chapin to Judge Thomas Burke, 1912

The historical memory of Fort Lawton, the U.S. Army post on what is now Seattle's Discovery Park, emphasizes a heartwarming narrative of civic patriotism. The Seattle Chamber of Commerce, a non-governmental organization of local business leaders, remembers Fort Lawton as one of its most important initiatives to foster the city's growth in the Progressive Era. Their website narrates how the Chamber's Army Post Committee provided the War Department 703 acres donated by dozens of owners for $1 apiece. It concludes by quoting an 1898 publication: "Money spent by the Chamber in securing this boon will return to the people a hundred-fold and more."[2] The city's Parks and Recreation Department website uses nearly identical language.[3] Historians of Fort Lawton have added a layer of scholarly legitimacy to this

[1] Letter from Herman Chapin to Judge Thomas Burke, January 13, 1912. Fort Lawton History Collection, 5801-04 (FLHC), Box 2, Folder 6, Seattle Municipal Archives (SMA).
[2] Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, "History: Building a World Class City," https://www.seattlechamber.com/pages/history/.
[3] Seattle Parks and Recreation, "Discovery Park History," https://www.seattle.gov/parks/allparks/discovery-park/discovery-park-history.

account of the Chamber's efforts.[4] A closer examination of the sequence of events that led to the establishment of Fort Lawton reveals that the accepted account does not reflect what actually took place. The Chamber turned over 641 acres, not the promised 703, and only a small portion was donated by civic-minded Seattleites. The majority of the land was bought, exchanged, or acquired against the wishes of its owners, who were, in some cases, minor children.

Throughout American history, the military has enabled economic growth in various ways. Scholars of the history of capitalism have highlighted the complementary relationship between the military and the market as a key component in the establishment and westward expansion of the United States. Nineteenth-century American capitalism was enabled by military force.[5] The Civil War brought about what historian Mark Wilson called a "mixed-military economy," where military logistics relied on private companies to provide the bulk of provisions to its troops.[6] The American military became profitable to businesses beyond the production of arms and ammunition. While the war's end brought a significant reduction in the size of the army and Navy, American capitalists continued to seek profit from the military. Historian Paul Koistinen examines the political economy between the Civil War and World War I, writing that Congressional representatives and municipal leaders were more interested in attracting scarce military dollars to their constituencies than national defense.[7]

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[4] See Ray T Cowell, "Fort Lawton," *The Washington Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1928): 31–36 and Jeffrey C. Sanders, "The Battle for Fort Lawton: Competing Environmental Claims in Postwar Seattle," *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 2 (2008): 203-235.

[5] See Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence : China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2000), Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (Vintage Books, 2015), and Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Basic Books, 2014).

[6] Mark Wilson, *The Business of Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State, 1861-1865* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2.

[7] Paul A. C. Koistinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865-1919* (University Press of Kansas, 1997), 104.

The relationship between city growth and military bases is an understudied component of urban history. Roger W. Lotchin conducted one of the few studies in this vein. His book *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* explores the relationship between war and urbanization. He contends that "California city builders set out to construct a series of great metropolises; and, more than anything else, that effort is what created the close ties between the city and military in the Golden State."[8] Lotchin argues that city boosters, driven by "metropolitan anxiety rather than from industrial necessity," made the key linkages between the military and urban areas.[9] He writes, "The nation-state and the boosters created resources and opportunities; the existence of the city determined specifically where these could be put and exploited; and the nation-state and the boosters split the decisions of who got what, when, where, and how."[10] The author claims that much of California's economic growth was made possible through the ties between cities and the military.

Was the interaction between Seattle and Fort Lawton a complementary market-military relationship or urban development fueled by military basing? While the Seattle Chamber of Commerce's institutional memory asserts that it was a successful public-private partnership, there is ample evidence to conclude that how Fort Lawton was established eliminated any possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship between the City of Seattle and the War Department. This chapter argues that while Seattle's business community parroted the War Department's stated desire for a military presence on the Puget Sound to provide coastal defense and respond to urban unrest, its true motivation was more clearly characterized as a commodity exchange that did not transpire: land for profit. The army, pressured by powerful congressional

[8]Roger W. Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (Oxford University Press, 1992), xvii.
[9]Lotchin, *Fortress California*, 16.
[10]Lotchin, *Fortress California*, 355.

interests, accepted a plot of land that was too small for evolving military requirements and lacked the necessary waterfront infrastructure to support its logistical needs. The Chamber anticipated Fort Lawton would host over a thousand soldiers and generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue for the city's businesses. When neither of these expectations materialized, the Chamber and its allies in Congress saw it as a betrayal by the army.

The War Department's records in the National Archives and the Seattle Chamber of Commerce's records in the city's municipal archives document the creation of Fort Lawton. These archives are nearly silent on the Seattle city government's role in Fort Lawton's creation. The Chamber of Commerce wielded significant power in Seattle during the 1890s and played a key role in the process of establishing the fort.[11] It hoped Fort Lawton would grow their city and enrich their businesses. They lobbied for an army post and bested their regional rivals to host it. They invested time and money into securing the land they promised the War Department, but delivered a landlocked, hilly property of minimal military utility in Seattle. The number of troops posted to Fort Lawton never reached the levels to validate the Chamber's projections for growing the local economy. Fort Lawton was a failure for both the War Department and the Chamber of Commerce. The municipal–military partnership aimed to establish a strategically significant military outpost in the Puget Sound that would also stimulate the local economy. Fort Lawton was neither of those outcomes; instead, it was a nearly useless lightning rod for continued tension between Seattle and the army.

A Post in the Puget Sound

[11] Clarence Stone's definition of regime politics, "the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions," is an accurate framing for Seattle's municipal power structure in the 1890s. See Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*. (University Press of Kansas, 1989), 6.

The impetus to establish Fort Lawton can be traced to Seattle's Anti-Chinese Riots in 1885-86. Many Chinese workers had entered the country to work on railroads that linked the eastern United States with the Pacific Coast. Thousands of workers streamed into the country in the 1870s to lay the tracks through often unforgiving terrain. After much of the work had been completed, public opinion overwhelmingly favored expelling the immigrants from the United States. Many in the Pacific Northwest were resentful of Chinese immigrants, who they perceived as taking their jobs and depressing their wages. Communities along the Puget Sound supported Congress when it passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, but believed the federal government was powerless to stop continued migration.[12] In the previous thirty years, many Euro-Americans began settling near the Puget Sound. Seattle competed with Tacoma and Portland to become the region's commercial center. Tacoma, thirty miles south of Seattle along the sound, had attracted the terminus of the first railroad to connect the region with the East, the Northern Pacific. The region's lumber and coal exports enabled steady growth for both cities, but they were far behind Portland in population density and the size of the local economy.[13]

The trouble between white residents and Chinese immigrants in the Puget Sound began in Tacoma in late 1885. In November, mobs drove approximately two hundred Chinese workers from their homes and the surrounding coal mines and hop fields.[14] Local authorities requested assistance from Vancouver Barracks, the Army Department of the Columbia's (the military organization responsible for Washington, Oregon, and Idaho) headquarters in Washington

[12] Clarence Bagley, *History of Seattle from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time,* Vol. 2. (The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1916), 149-153.
[13] Roger Sale, *Seattle, Past to Present* (University of Washington Press, 1976), 50-53.
[14] Military Department, State of Washington, *The Official History of the Washington National Guard*, Vol. 4 (Camp Murray, WA), 90.

Territory 130 miles to the south. The army dispatched ten infantry companies by ship to Tacoma. They arrived five days after the riots and were too late to protect the Chinese from expulsion from their homes.[15]

In February 1886, a second mob formed to expel Chinese immigrants, this time in Seattle. Alarmed, Washington Territory's Governor Watson C. Squire sent telegrams to the Secretaries of War and Interior, as well as to the commander of troops at Vancouver Barracks, reading:

> IMMENSE MOB FORCING CHINESE TO LEAVE SEATTLE. CIVIL AUTHORITIES ARMING "POSSE COMITATUS" TO PROTECT THEM. SERIOUS CONFLICT PROBABLE. I RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THAT UNITED STATES TROOPS BE IMMEDIATELY SENT TO SEATTLE. TROOPS FROM PORT TOWNSEND CAN ARRIVE SOONEST AND PROBABLY WILL BE SUFFICIENT. HAVE ISSUED PROCLAMATION.[16]

Governor Squire instituted martial law in the territory and struggled to keep the peace with the resources he had on hand. The following day, after 196 Chinese workers had been driven out of town on a steamship, violence broke out between mobs and sheriffs trying to keep the peace. The local militia was called to support the sheriffs, but the mobs would not disperse.[17] An informal group of armed Seattle citizens, calling themselves the Home Guard and composed of some of the leading businessmen in the city, mustered in support of the militia.[18] As the authorities waited for the army to respond to the violence on February 8, the Home Guard took to the streets of Seattle, killing a rioter and wounding several others. On the evening of February 9, President

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[15] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department* (Government Printing Office, 1886), 185.
[16] Governor Watson C. Squire to Secretaries of War, Interior, and General John Gibbon, February 7, 1886, in *The Official History of the Washington National Guard*, Vol. 4, 90.
[17] Military Department, State of Washington, *The Official History of the Washington National Guard,* 91-92.
[18] George Kinnear, *Anti-Chinese Riots at Seattle, WN., February 8th, 1886* (1911), 5.

Grover Cleveland dispatched infantry from Vancouver Barracks, which arrived the next day. By that point, the Home Guard and other forces had restored order.[19]

Twice in six months, mob rule had briefly taken over the leading towns in the Puget Sound, and twice, the military had been unable to respond promptly. Some of the delay was due to the Posse Comitatus Act, which constrained the use of the military domestically unless by order of the President. Additionally, the physical distance of 130 miles between Puget Sound and Vancouver Barracks was too great to respond quickly. In both November 1885 and February 1886, it took more than twenty-four hours for troops to arrive after being authorized to respond to unrest. In Seattle, an improvised gang of wealthy locals turned the tide against the mob, not federal troops. Given the expanding population and importance of the region, the army's presence in Puget Sound would need to be augmented.

One month after the riot, King County commissioners representing Seattle wrote a letter to the Secretary of War, requesting an army post in their town. They provided several reasons for the necessity of the military post:

> On account of its contiguity to the coal mines, its central location and ease of access said city is more likely to be chosen as the theatre for lawless demonstrations and outbreaks by all the disorderly elements within its reach than any other place in the entire Department of the Columbia. For that reason troops should be at hand should such circumstances arise as to necessitate their use as a posse comitatus.[20]

[19] *The Official History of the Washington National Guard,* 92-100.
[20]Letter from King County Commissioners to Secretary of War William Endicott, March 18, 1886. FLHC, Box 1, Folder 6, SMA.

The commissioners were concerned not only with anti-immigrant violence but also with labor unrest. The need was so great that they offered the federal government free land for an army post.

In this instance, local security concerns coincided with the army's shifting priorities during the last decades of the century. Since the end of the Civil War, the army had been reduced to approximately 20,000 soldiers and scattered throughout the West to enable Euro-American settlement in Indigenous lands, often at the point of a gun. By 1885, 119 posts dotted the expansive landscape. Most frontier outposts housed fewer than one hundred troops, and thirty-eight were empty.[21] As tribes were forced onto reservations and violence lessened, the army looked to consolidate near cities to respond to future challenges. As the Inspector General of the Army wrote in 1885, "It is reasonable to infer from the signs of the times that for the protection of life and property there is a need of military posts with relatively large garrisons in the vicinity of our populous centers."[22] Nationwide, but particularly in the West, the army began looking for cities near railway junctions to consolidate its troops.

But it was not until 1894 that the policy of consolidating on larger facilities and the need for a new military post in the Puget Sound aligned. The Secretary of War's annual report to Congress included an assessment from the Commanding General of the Army, John Schofield, that the force had spent a considerable amount of time and effort in the past year "in the suppression of domestic violence, which took the form, in many cases, of forcible resistance to the execution of the laws of the United States, seizure or destruction of property under the care of

[21] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department* (Government Printing Office, 1885), 109.
[22] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department,* 1885, 109.

United States officers, and open defiance of the national authority."[23] He called for "the establishment . . . of large military posts near the great business and railway centers of the country."[24] The army's Department of the Columbia pushed for a new military post in the Puget Sound for the region's general security and coastal defense. The department's commander, General Elwell Otis, wrote a lengthy assessment of the system of forts in his department, recommending the closure of many and the consolidation of limited resources on two posts near rail junctions. He recommended a new post in eastern Washington near Spokane, close to the rail lines linking Washington with Oregon and the restive mining regions of Idaho, and a second in Seattle.[25] Otis wrote that Seattle offered "the most favorable conditions for location, as that is the center of a small territory in which the future use of troops will be demanded, and the place at which exhibitions of lawlessness beyond the power of the State to control have so frequently manifested themselves."[26] While General Otis was concerned about domestic unrest, he also felt unsure of his ability to defend the Puget Sound from external attacks. He assessed that the government had "done very little looking to the protection of the Puget Sound and adjacent United States territory contained within the State of Washington against possible foreign attack."[27] While the military had studied the western coast of the United States for vulnerabilities for nearly twenty years, little action had been taken to mitigate the problem.

For decades, military officials had been aware of the need to secure the sound. During the Civil War, an inspection team traveled to the Puget Sound to assess the need for additional fortifications. Finding the region sparsely settled and heavily forested, the immediate need for

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[23] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), 57.
[24] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department*, 1894, 60.
[25] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department*, 1894, 149-150.
[26] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department*, 1894, 151.
[27] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department*, 1894, 150.

fortifications was dismissed.[28] In 1871, military officials surveyed Lake Washington as a potential shipyard. As a large freshwater body near the ocean, it was an attractive site for a naval facility. Army Engineer First Lieutenant Thomas Handbury sketched a possible canal linking Lake Washington to Lake Union, then to the Puget Sound north of the small logging town of Seattle.[29] The concept was shelved for over twenty years.

By 1885, renewed tensions with the United Kingdom and advances in naval technology prompted Congress to order Secretary of War William C. Endicott to conduct a detailed study of coastal defenses. Innovations in rifled cannons mounted on modern naval ships had made most American coastal defenses obsolete. The subsequent effort surveyed 4,000 miles of the American coastline and provided Congress with estimates of the necessary investments in coastal defenses to mitigate external threats. After analyzing various means of protecting twenty-seven key harbors on the Atlantic and Pacific seaboard, the Endicott Board recommended over $126 million in improvements. Still, it did not include Puget Sound in the initial list of the most exposed points on the western coastline. Congressional interest in coastal defense vulnerabilities continued after the Endicott Board.[30]

In 1888, Congress commissioned the War Department to report on the naval defense of Puget Sound. The region is an inland network of waterways and islands connected to the Pacific Ocean by the Straits of Juan de Fuca, linking Washington Territory to San Francisco and other Pacific trade ports. Whidbey Island, a long and narrow island stretching north to south, bisects

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[28] Letter from Captain George H. Elliot to Colonel R.E. Derussy, September 9, 1864. Senate Executive Document 165, 50th Congress. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 12, SMA.
[29] Letter from First Lieutenant Thomas H. Handbury to Board of Engineers, Pacific Coast, December 15, 1871. Senate Executive Document 165, 50th Congress. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 12, SMA.
[30] William C. Endicott, *Report of the Board on Fortifications or Other Defenses appointed by the President of the United States under the provisions of the act of Congress approved March 3, 1885* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1886), 1-30.

Puget Sound. To reach the populated areas of Seattle, Tacoma, and Olympia, a ship could sail west of Whidbey Island along the broad and deep Admiralty Inlet. Another possible route was to squeeze through Deception Pass, north of Whidbey, and travel southward along the island's eastern coast. Both routes converged near Seattle, the more northerly port in the Sound.[31]

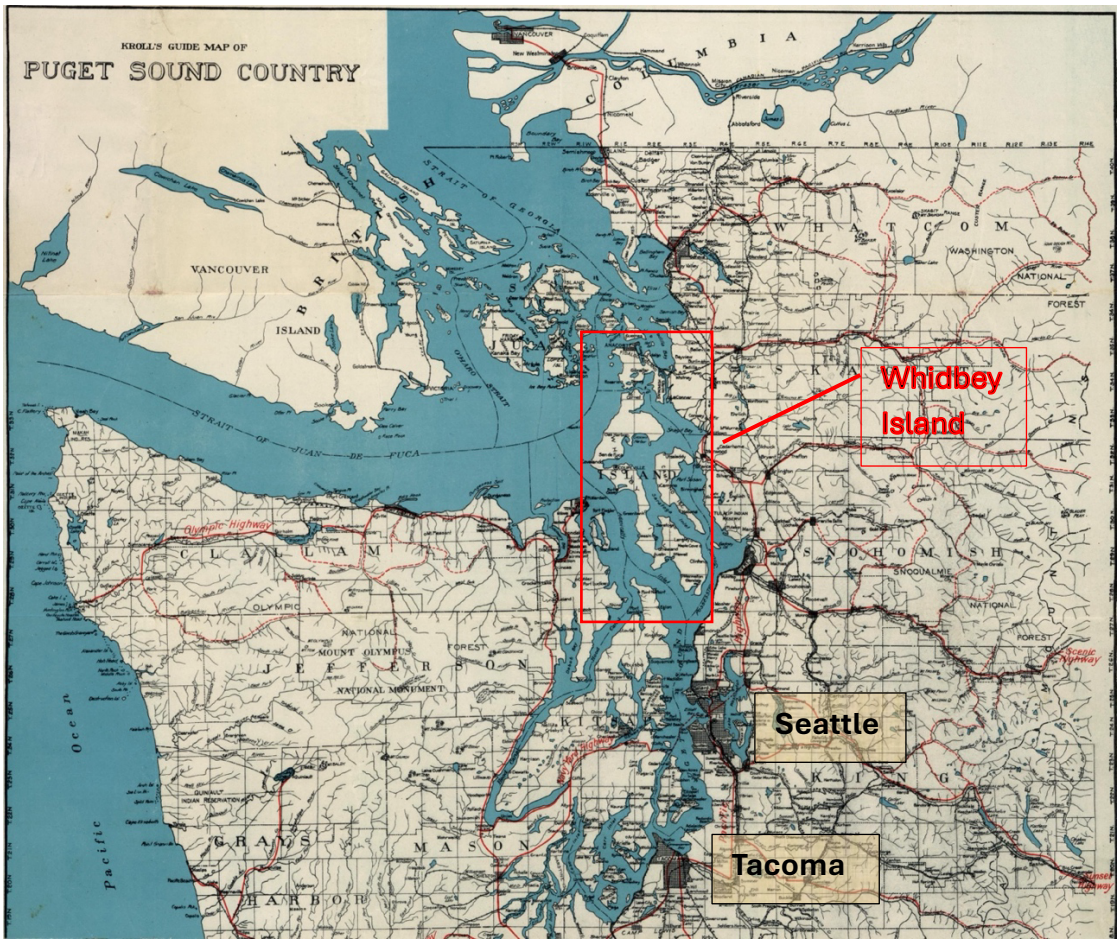

Figure 1 "Puget Sound Country." Source: Kroll Map Company, 1919, part of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~215709~5502509:Puget-Sound-Country. Notations by author.

[31] Letter from Brigadier General J.C. Duane to Secretary of War William C. Endicott, April 27, 1888. Senate Executive Document 165, 50th Congress. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 12, SMA.

By the time of General Otis's report to Congress in 1894, military planners envisioned a two-tier defense of Puget Sound and a future Lake Washington naval facility linked by a ship canal. The first line of defense would be smaller installations along the two axes of approach to Seattle along Whidbey Island's west and east coasts. At those installations, batteries of coastal artillery would be emplaced to destroy enemy vessels as they approached Seattle. The second line of defense would be a larger facility in either Seattle or Tacoma to host another battery of guns. Army planners estimated that a regiment of coastal artillery troops would be needed to operate the system of defenses in the Puget Sound.[32]

The army thus had three compelling reasons to construct a new fort in Puget Sound. A larger base near the growing cities of Seattle and Tacoma would align with the army's vision to abandon isolated frontier outposts in favor of new bases near cities. Additionally, the region had become the hub of four rail lines and maintained shipping connections to other ports along the coast. The continued focus on coastal defense, the vulnerability of the Puget Sound to British naval attack, and the potential for a shipyard in Lake Washington linked by a new canal made Seattle an ideal location for a new base. Seattle's business and civic leaders would use all these reasons to make their case for a new military post in their city, employing different arguments at different times to achieve their desired goal.

For Seattle's business community, the military utility of a base was secondary to securing its advantage over its rivals in Tacoma and enhancing the prestige and economic prospects of its growing metropolis. The city's boosters believed securing the new army fort in the Puget Sound was a key component to their goal of becoming the preeminent city in the Pacific Northwest. In

[32] Board of Engineers, U.S. army, "Artillery Defense of Puget Sound–Views on Proposed Projects," June 27, 1895. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 6, SMA.

their first outreach to the War Department in 1886, civic leaders described Seattle as "the center of the commerce, trade and travel of Western Washington and, with the exception of Portland, is by far the largest city in the Pacific Northwest."[33] The County Commissioners overstated their case. In the 1880s, Portland was nearly five times larger than Seattle and was a significantly more prominent economic hub. Seattle and Portland would not become comparable in population and economy until 1910.[34] Tacoma was more comparable in size to Seattle and, in 1874, had been selected as the terminus of the Northern Pacific Railroad over their rival thirty miles to the north, a loss that rankled Seattle's leaders.[35] If, however, Seattle became home to a large military facility, then the added security and income from the construction and maintenance of the base could fulfill the commissioners' vision.

In 1894, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce contacted General Otis to lobby him for a new army fort in Seattle. Otis, in his response to the Chamber, requested 1,000 acres of land on Magnolia Bluff. By the end of the month, the Chamber had organized a committee to obtain the land for the army. One of their first actions was to determine who owned the plots on the bluff and devise a plan to acquire them.[36] Businessmen, not civic officials, led the efforts to bring an army post to Seattle. For the next four years, the Chamber of Commerce led the effort to acquire Magnolia Bluff, enlisting its city government and congressional allies to lend their support with a veneer of official endorsement when necessary.

In the early months of 1895, the Chamber of Commerce drafted a bill to authorize the acquisition of Magnolia Bluff for an army base, provided it was at least 640 acres and donated

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[33] Letter from King County Commissioners to Secretary of War William Endicott, March 18, 1886.
[34] Roger Sale, *Seattle, Past to Present*, 78-79.
[35] Roger Sale, *Seattle, Past to Present*, 32-33.
[36] Records of the Board of Trustees Meetings, Seattle Chamber of Commerce, for November 13, 20, and 27, 1894. FHLC, Box 2, Folder 4, SMA.

without cost to the United States Government. They forwarded the draft to their ally in Washington, Senator Watson Squire. Former governor of Washington Territory and Seattle property owner, Squire served as the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Coast Defenses. He introduced the Chamber's legislation in the Senate as part of a larger bill to fund the activities of the War Department. The Chamber's plan to secure the base without opposition suffered a setback when Representative William Doolittle, who represented the district encompassing Tacoma, successfully amended the bill in the House of Representatives to authorize a new army post in the Puget Sound rather than specifically in Seattle as Squire's legislation had proposed.[37]

Nine years after the anti-Chinese riots, the Puget Sound would finally become home to an army post. The threat of further civil unrest and new military priorities were necessary to gain the support of military authorities and Congress. Seattle's Chamber of Commerce cultivated the army's interest in Magnolia Bluff as a potential site and attempted to secure it without competition from their civic rivals in Tacoma. Having fallen short of their goal, Seattle's business community would dedicate their efforts towards ensuring the War Department's endorsement of Magnolia Bluff as the site for the army Post and obtaining the lands by any means necessary.

The Scheuermans of Salmon Bay

Having received Congressional authorization to accept a land donation for a new army post in the Puget Sound, the War Department began the process of selecting the best site. The legislation specified that a board of army officers should weigh the offers of various

[37] "A Military Center," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 16, 1895.

municipalities before making a decision. Before the board was in place, the army's commanding general made his views known. Lieutenant General John Schofield wrote a letter to the Secretary of War in July 1895 advocating for the site in Seattle over a proposed piece of land outside of Tacoma. For Schofield, Magnolia Bluff was a more advantageous site for coastal defense. While he believed the site Tacoma offered would be better for infantry troops, he prioritized defense against naval attack as the most important consideration.[38]

The Secretary of War appointed a Board of Fortifications consisting of three officers to survey sites for the new army post in January 1896. Over the next several weeks, the board evaluated a total of seven sites in the Puget Sound. Tacoma offered two for evaluation: Point Defiance near the town center and American Lake south of the town. Point Defiance, part of a city park, was suitable for coastal artillery but thirty miles south of the main ship channel. American Lake, a large tract of land, was judged useless for military purposes, particularly coastal artillery. It was too far from the Puget Sound, and the soil quality was assessed as inadequate for the army's purposes. North of Seattle, the small town of New Whatcom offered 900 acres of the Lummi Indian Reservation, which was not theirs to give. Their bid, as well as those offered by Everett and Olympia, were rejected immediately.

Army engineers evaluated Port Townsend and another location on Whidbey Island as locations for Puget Sound's first line of coastal defense. Given its relative location to Admiralty Inlet, Magnolia Bluff in Seattle was considered an ideal location for the second line of defense. The officers emphasized in their report that the key to the viability of Magnolia Bluff as an army

[38]Letter from Lieutenant General John Schofield to Secretary of War Daniel Lamont, July 30, 1895. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.

post was the acquisition of the shoreline on Salmon Bay, where a protected wharf could be established to transport supplies and heavy artillery to the new base.[39]

Having secured the recommendation of the board, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce assembled a formal bid for the army post. It dispatched a letter to the army board, offering 703.21 acres of land on Magnolia Bluff. The accompanying map included the desired frontage on Salmon Bay and showed a total of twenty-three separate lots of land belonging to different owners.[40] The Chamber did not inform the army that only 160 acres, owned by a member of the organization, were in hand at the time of their offer.[41] Instead, the Chamber assured the War Department that all "arrangements [were] perfected for obtaining this valuable tract within the City limits of Seattle."[42] It was the first of many instances in which the Seattle Chamber of Commerce deliberately misled the military to achieve its goal.

[39] Report of the Board of Fortifications, February 15, 1896. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 7, SMA.
[40] "Proposed Military Post Site, Magnolia Bluff, Seattle, WN," RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[41] "Fort Lawton, Wash." Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, Record Group 77: War Department Map Collection, November 1913.
[42] Letter from the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to the Quartermaster General, U.S. army, January 6, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA

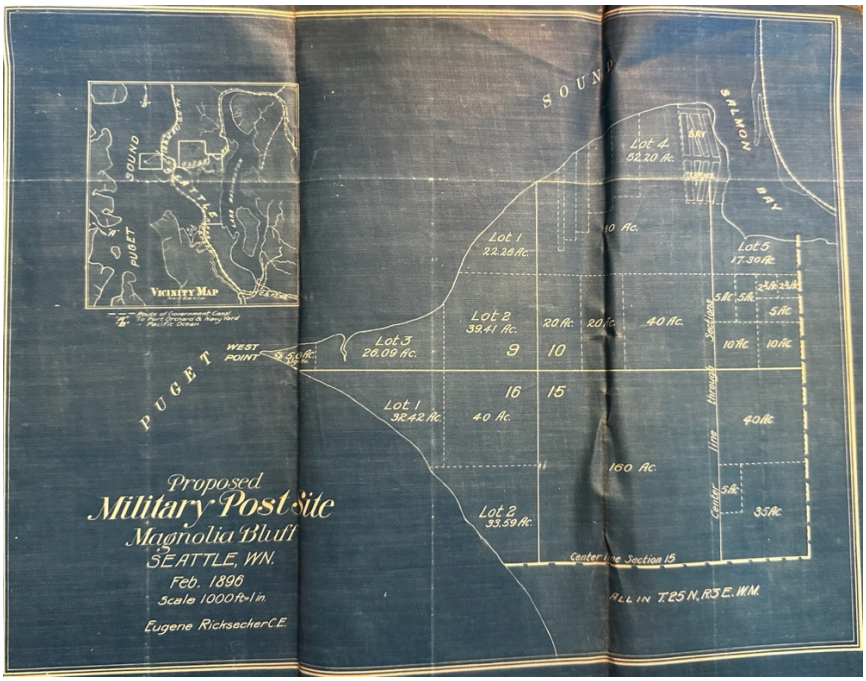

Figure 2 Eugene Ricksecker, "Proposed Military Post Site, Magnolia Bluff, Seattle, WN," Source: Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, The National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

To sweeten the deal, the Chamber mobilized its civic and business relationships. It persuaded the city of Seattle to offer clean water to the post at a discounted rate of three cents per thousand gallons.[43] The West Street and North End Electric Railway Company committed to building a branch line of their trolley route from downtown Seattle north to Ballard to connect the proposed fort with the city.[44] One of the Chamber's leading officials, J. S. Goldsmith, dispatched an offer to supply building materials to the army with price quotes.[45] The Secretary of War quickly accepted the Chamber of Commerce's offer of 703 acres.[46]

[43] Letter from the City of Seattle to the army Post Committee, February 10, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[44] Letter from the West Street and North End Electric Railway Company to the army Post Committee, February 14, 1896. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 7, SMA.
[45] Letter from J.S. Goldsmith to army Post Committee, February 8, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[46] Letter from the Office of the Secretary of War to Senator Watson Squire, March 2, 1896. Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, Box 82, Folder 1, NARA.

The Chamber, desperate to secure the new army post, took a significant risk in offering Magnolia Bluff to the government free of charge. While it had been organizing its bid since November 1894, none of the land was in hand at the time of the offer. There was some acknowledgment of the risk it was taking in a carefully worded letter the Chamber had sent to the army's Quartermaster General a month before their formal proposal to the Secretary of War. While exuding confidence that Magnolia Bluff could be acquired, it urged the War Department to accept the Chamber's offer quickly. The Chamber wanted to capitalize on the existing political climate to implement a series of land transfers and condemnations before circumstances changed. The businessmen intended to press the State of Washington to sell lands set aside for schools to exchange with property holders for their Magnolia Bluff tracts and to use existing legal procedures to seize lands from property owners not interested in selling their lots.[47] They had an ally in the Governor's office until the end of 1896, when former Seattle sheriff John McGraw's term would end. The army's Board of Fortifications report, which the Secretary of War relied upon to select Magnolia Bluff as the site for a new post, noted the difficulty in acquiring the land at several proposed sites, influencing their recommendation to select Seattle.[48] If the War Department knew the complications that lay ahead in securing the promised plot of land for the new fort, it is unlikely they would have accepted the Chamber's offer in March 1896.

Now committed to providing 703 acres encompassing the entirety of Magnolia Bluff, the Chamber set to work. They planned to use several methods to achieve their goal. 160 acres already belonged to Chamber members and would be donated to the cause. From the State of Washington, they would purchase lands previously set aside for schools on Magnolia Bluff and

[47] Letter from the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to the Quartermaster General, U.S. army, January 6, 1896.
[48] Report of the Board of Fortifications, February 15, 1896.

another tract further north of Seattle. They would use the latter to swap with some property owners, providing them an equivalent amount of land for what they gave to the Chamber of Commerce. Chamber members and local businesses would raise donations to buy land and fund legal efforts to seize the lands of uncooperative landowners. Through these methods, the Chamber hoped to secure the Bluff quickly and without complications.

The Chamber of Commerce started fundraising soon after the Secretary of War accepted Magnolia Bluff. Members leaned on local businesses to provide the necessary funds. The largest donor was the Seattle Brewing and Malting Company, which gave $2500. Banks gave $2150. The two major railroads, the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific, gave $1000 each.[49] By July, the Chamber had collected $22,000 in donations.[50] Over the next two months, they purchased 640 acres of land north of Seattle from the State of Washington. The land, set aside by the State Legislature for schools, was sold by the state's land commissioner to the Chamber for a total of $15,112 ($567,153 in 2025 dollars) at $23.61 an acre.[51]

The remaining funds were used for various purposes. The Chamber's record of donations and purchases includes notes from a multitude of Chamber officials instructing the treasurers, Griffith Davies and Thomas Prosch, to pay a business or individual. Despite their best efforts, Davies and Prosch were overwhelmed by unaccountable funds flowing in and out of the Chamber's coffers, ostensibly for the civic purpose of donating Magnolia Bluff to the War Department. At the end of their account book, in January 1897, Prosch added the following:

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[49] army Post Committee Record of Donations and Land Purchases, 1896-1897. University of Washington Special Collections, 4631-01, Box 1.
[50] Records of the Board of Trustees Meeting, Seattle Chamber of Commerce, for July 21, 1896. FHLC, Box 2, Folder 4, SMA.
[51] army Post Committee Cash Account Book, 1896-1897. University of Washington Special Collections, 4631-01, Box 1.

> Early in 1897, it became impossible to keep the account of Army Post money. The Committee men received and expended as suited their convenience, making reports in some cases and in some cases not. These irregularities made it impossible for me to continue the record with any satisfaction or for Mr. Davies to continue as Treasurer. Accordingly, we officially stopped. Thomas M. Prosch[52]

Before they quit, however, the major purpose of the donated funds, to buy the school land from the State, had been accomplished. The Chamber then turned to the far more difficult work of convincing recalcitrant property owners to exchange or sell their plots.

In 1870, a German immigrant named Christian Scheuerman purchased 151 acres of land on the northern periphery of Magnolia Bluff, paying $450 to the two owners.[53] Seattle, less than twenty years old, was six miles to the south. Scheuerman set up his homestead on the shores of Salmon Bay, a sheltered cove on the eastern shore of Magnolia Bluff. He farmed with his Indigenous common-law wife, Rebecca, who had eight children with Scheuerman before dying in 1884.[54] If there were to be an army post on Magnolia Bluff that included Salmon Bay, Scheuerman would have to be persuaded to leave his homestead and cede his claim.

By October 1896, the Chamber of Commerce had acquired 454.8 acres of the 703 acres they had promised on Magnolia Bluff.[55] Their strategy of land swaps and purchases had gotten them most of the way to their goal. Their major obstacle going forward was the Scheuerman family. Christian Scheuerman's 151 acres were the most important tract on Magnolia Bluff, as it

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[52] army Post Committee Cash Account Book.
[53] Land Deeds: Henry Bankton to Christian Scheurman[sp], May 12, 1870; John C. Hornbeck to Christian Scheurman[sp], July 16, 1870. Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92 (RG 92), Box 1067, Folder 86726, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC (NARA).
[54] *Christian Scheuerman v. Lisette Backus et al.*, File Number 11532 (Sup. Court of the State of WA for King County, 1893).
[55] Letter from the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to Captain W.W. Robinson, October 14, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.

was the land abutting the shore around Salmon Bay, which the military had assessed as vital to the site's viability as a military facility. Scheuerman's homestead with his second wife, Kate, was built where the army had envisioned constructing their wharf to support the new base. The old German farmer did not own all of his original tract anymore. In 1890, he had sold twenty acres to Albert M. Brookes for $25,000, who planned a new housing development, Bay Terrace, on the recently acquired land.[56] After the sale, Scheuerman's children from his common-law marriage took him to court, arguing they were entitled to a portion of Scheuerman's windfall. The old man settled, granting each ten acres in exchange for foregoing all future claims to his land and property.[57] Just to be safe, he signed over the deed of his homestead on Salmon Bay, the ten most important acres of the proposed army Post on Magnolia Bluff, to his wife Kate in 1894.[58]

Christian Scheuerman cooperated with the Chamber of Commerce, exchanging twenty acres of his land on the bluff for school lands to the north. Several of his children followed suit with their tracts. But his wife Kate refused to sell the homestead. As an American woman in the late nineteenth century, Mrs. Scheuerman had no security beyond her husband and the property he had given her. And she feared that her husband, sixty-two years old in 1896, was not long for the world.[59] She also feared her stepchildren's designs on her husband's property and her security.[60] Consequently, she refused to sell her homestead for any price. The Scheuermans had two key advantages over other landowners targeted for condemnation: money and lawyers. Scheuerman owned a building in Seattle's commercial center and earned enough to retain several

[56] Land Deed: Christian Scheuerman to Albert M. Brookes, April 9, 1890. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[57] *Christian Scheuerman v. Lisette Backus et al.*; *County of King v. Catherine Scheuerman et al.* File Number 23964 (Sup. Court of the State of WA for King County, 1897).
[58] Land Deed: Christian Scheuerman to Kate Scheuerman, April 4, 1894. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[59] 1880 United States Federal Census. Lake Union and Salmon Bay, King, Washington, Roll 1397; Family History Film: 1255397, Page 274C, Enumeration District 008.
[60] *Kellogg v. Scheuerman.* File Number 23484 (Sup. Court of the State of WA for King County, 1897).

attorneys.[61] His lawyers had already proven their effectiveness by convincing the state supreme court to overturn a civil judgment against the Scheuermans for defamation of character brought by their neighbor on Magnolia Bluff.[62] Chamber officials could expect a lengthy court battle if they tried to condemn Scheuerman's lands for the army post. With the War Department increasingly frustrated by delays in receiving the land, their best path forward was to convince the army it did not need the Salmon Bay anchorage that planners assessed as key to the fort's viability.

Christian Scheuerman did not utilize his resources to protect the land he had gifted to his children. When the minor-aged Scheuermans, along with other landowners on Magnolia Bluff, refused to sell to the Chamber of Commerce, King County initiated court procedures to condemn the land for the purposes of the military post. A jury was appointed to determine appropriate compensation for the seized land, and a Chamber-allied law firm was paid to argue in favor of the condemnations.[63] After receiving Scheuerman's permission, the Chamber also funded a guardian *ad litem* to represent the children in court, who agreed to a financial settlement that awarded the children $100 per acre for their land ($3853 in 2025), much less than the army's estimated value of $500 per acre and a fraction of the $1250 per acre their father received for an adjacent plot in 1890.[64] Only speculation can fill in the gap of why Christian Scheuerman did not use his resources to protect his children in court, or whether the judge and jury knew the

[61] Obituary of Christian Scheuerman, *Seattle Daily Times*, January 28, 1907.
[62] *Kellogg v. Scheuerman.*
[63] army Post Committee Record of Donations and Land Purchases.
[64] Records of the Board of Trustees Meeting, Seattle Chamber of Commerce, for March 24, 1897. FHLC, Box 2, Folder 4, SMA; army Post Committee Cash Account Book; *County of King v. Catherine Scheuerman et al;* Letter from Captain W.W. Robinson to the Quartermaster General, February 15, 1897. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA. The Chamber of Commerce paid Eugene Ricksetter, a civil engineer employed by the army and who had drafted the sketch plan accompanying the Chamber's original proposal, $10.00 to stand as guardian for the Scheuerman children in court.

Chamber was funding their legal representation.[65] Regardless, Scheuerman held on to his land, and his children did not. With all their legal maneuverings, the Chamber of Commerce would still not be able to meet its commitment of delivering 703 acres to the War Department as promised.

Meanwhile, the army had assigned Captain W. W. Robinson as Constructing Quartermaster for the new post in June 1896 and ordered him to move to Seattle and prepare to begin construction.[66] Once he arrived in Seattle, Robinson informed the Quartermaster General that the land was not ready for an army post. The Chamber of Commerce, seeking an ally, enlisted Robinson to recommend patience to his superiors, given the complexity of the land claims. Robinson would be caught in the middle of reconciling the Chamber's commitments to the War Department and the reality on the ground.[67]

As the War Department's representative in Seattle, Captain Robinson was being influenced by both sides. He sent a frustrated letter to the Chamber in October 1896, demanding a full account of what land the Chamber had acquired and when it would be turned over to the government.[68] Later in the month, on the 23rd, he wrote to his superiors in Washington to ask permission to start clearing the land for the army post, a Chamber suggestion they claimed would

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[65] R. Kent Newmyer and Joan G. Zimmerman argue that conservative jurisprudence in the late 1800s favored business and government interests at the expense of marginalized groups, including women and children. Even if the court was aware that the Chamber of Commerce essentially controlled both sides of the litigation, it would have likely not made a difference in the outcome. See R. Kent. Newmyer, "Harvard Law School, New England Legal Culture, and the Antebellum Origins of American Jurisprudence," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 3 (1987): 814–35, and Joan G. Zimmerman, "The Jurisprudence of Equality: The Women's Minimum Wage, the First Equal Rights Amendment, and Adkins v. Children's Hospital, 1905-1923," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (1991): 188–225.

[66] Letter from Captain C.P. Miller to Captain W.W. Robinson, June 19, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.

[67] Letter from Captain W.W. Robinson to the Quartermaster General, July 28, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.

[68] Letter from Captain W.W. Robinson to Chamber of Commerce, October 1, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.

help them get land titles transferred to the government.[69] By the end of 1896, it became clear that the most the Chamber could acquire for the army Post was 641 acres, which was sixty-two acres and an entire shoreline short of their promise.

In a letter to the War Department offering 641 acres instead of the promised 703 acres, the Chamber explained its position:

> You will note that the site tendered does not include Lot 5, the Scheuerman homestead, and in explanation I would say that this tract is not within the power of this Committee to obtain, and we have ceased our efforts to do so. In our efforts to obtain this tract we have worked unceasingly, but to no avail. We have called to our aid the owner's friends, business associates, advisors and the entire weight of public opinion, all to no avail, and, for insurmountable legal obstacles, this tract cannot be obtained by condemnation by the local authorities.[70]

The Chamber offered water access through a small strip of land north of the Army Post site and another wharf location farther to the east connected by a road to the base. Captain Robinson urged his superiors to accept the offer, arguing that the alternate wharf sites were more than sufficient to support the fort.[71] The Secretary of War asked the board of officers who initially recommended Magnolia Bluff to examine the revised plan. While expressing their view that the Scheuerman homestead was key to the utility of the future post, they concurred with the new plan if it included the two new sites for water access.[72] Those, they wrote, would adequately compensate for the lost Salmon Bay frontage that the Scheuermans refused to sell. Robinson and

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[69] Letter from Captain W.W. Robinson to the Quartermaster General, October 21, 1896. RG 92, Box 1068, Folder 86726, NARA.
[70] Letter from the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to Captain W.W. Robinson, April 23, 1897. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[71] Letter from Captain W.W. Robinson to the Quartermaster General, April 23, 1897. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[72] Letter from the Board of Fortifications to the Secretary of War, May 11, 1897. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.

the Army Board were wrong. By 1912, the wharves were underwater, the access road had been returned to the city, and the northern beachhead was utterly useless without a costly dredging project, which the army declined to fund.[73]

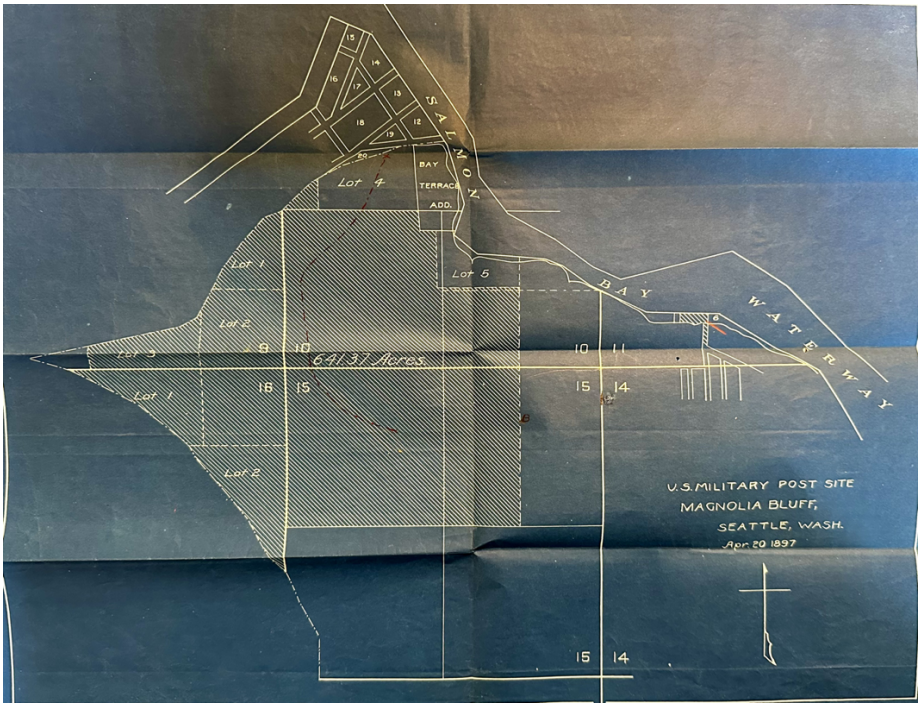

Figure 3 "U.S. Military Post Site Magnolia Bluff, Seattle, Wash." April 20, 1897. Source: Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, The National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

The Chamber took final steps to complete the intricate series of land transfers and condemnations necessary to make their donation. They expelled squatters from the school lands north of Seattle to prepare them for exchange with the Magnolia Bluff landholders.[74] Three rounds of negotiations were required with Christian Scheuerman to acquire a 1.51-acre corridor through his land to provide a potential dock site on the Puget Sound.[75] The City of Seattle

[73] First Endorsement Memorandum from Colonel J. W. Kennon to the Commanding General, Western Division, December 12, 1912. FHLC, Box 2, Folder 6, SMA.
[74] *Prosch v. Halstrom.* File Number 23407 (Sup. Court of the State of WA for King County, 1897).
[75] Office of the Judge Advocate General, U.S. army, *United States Military Reservations, National Cemeteries, and Military Parks* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 380-381.

withdrew its promise to provide cheap water to the army post, citing deficiencies in its system to pump the required gallons up the bluff to the base.[76] The War Department insisted that the city lay down a new 10-inch water main to supply the post. City authorities agreed upon a 6-inch pipe, which mollified the War Department.[77] Construction finally began on the new post in 1898, after the Quartermaster General was able to find $200,000 in the budget for new buildings.[78]

The final form of the Magnolia Bluff army post looked very different than the site accepted by the War Department two years earlier. The northern part of the proposed base, bordering Salmon Bay, remained in the hands of Christian Scheuerman and Albert Brooke, minus a narrow corridor. The majority of the bluff's landowners now had equivalent tracts of land north of Seattle on lands previously set aside for schools. The Chamber of Commerce had raised money to buy land and pay court costs, and so much of it was unaccountable that its treasurers stopped record-keeping. The minor children of Christian Scheuerman saw their inheritance signed away by a Chamber-funded guardian for much less than the market rate. By the time construction began, both the War Department and the Seattle Chamber of Commerce had encountered numerous frustrations, setbacks, and concessions in their partnership for a new army post.

Our Citizens Expect a Regimental Post

[76] Letter from the City of Seattle Comptroller to Captain W.W. Robinson, August 25, 1897. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[77] Letter from the Quartermaster General to Captain W.W. Robinson, February 28, 1898. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 9, SMA.
[78] Letter from the Quartermaster General to the Secretary of War, March 3, 1898. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 9, SMA.

While the Seattle Chamber of Commerce would employ the army's justifications for establishing a post in Seattle, like urban unrest, coastal defense, or proximity to rail lines, their principal motivation in securing Magnolia Bluff was to make money. The city's business community was looking for an economic accelerant that would enable it to overtake its rival, Tacoma, and cement its place as the dominant metropolis in the Pacific Northwest. In their internal communications and outreach to the army, the Chamber was agnostic about what the army used Magnolia Bluff for, whether coastal defense or otherwise, as long as there were a lot of soldiers in their city. This view manifested itself as a strong push on the army to make Magnolia Bluff the home of a regiment of over 1000 troops. The failure to follow through with the Chamber's promises to the War Department for the army post on Magnolia Bluff, both for space and services, likely doomed the prospect of a regimental post on the outskirts of Seattle.

The Chamber of Commerce calculated how much windfall they expected to receive from their envisioned regimental post. They calculated the construction costs to be $910,000. Seattle's businesses expected the army post's annual operating budget to be $434,400, or $36,200 a month, which they hoped would be expended on their businesses. They summarized their support for the army post as an economic windfall:

> When it is considered that the support of a regimental post involves an annual expenditure of $434,000 for salaries, pay and the necessary expenditures of a Quartermaster's Department, its important bearing upon trade conditions in Seattle, where practically the entire amount is expended, can be appreciated.[79]

According to their assessment, the Seattle business community could recoup its $22,000 in donations to secure Magnolia Bluff in one month of regimental post operations if a large

[79] Seattle Chamber of Commerce, "A Few Facts About Seattle," 1898. FHLC, Box 2, Folder 3, SMA.

percentage of the $36,200 in operating expenses were spent in the local economy. Thus, the long efforts to secure the necessary land would be justified if the size of the army's garrison brought in the revenue Seattle's business community craved.

Soon after offering Magnolia Bluff to the army, the Chamber of Commerce discussed how to get their end of the bargain. The minutes of their meeting on July 26, 1896, detailed their strategy: "The president suggested that the citizens of Seattle ought to have some understanding with the War Department, as to the dimensions of the Army Post, before finally seeding [sic] site; and he was authorized to communicate with the Secretary of War in the matter."[80] The Chamber's President, E. O. Graves, sent a letter to the Secretary of War the same day, conveying the Chamber's push to dictate the size of the future army post:

> It has been necessary to raise the funds required for the purchase of the land by public subscription, and some of the subscribers to the fund have made their donations contingent on the actual establishment of an army Post of certain dimensions upon the land. It has been the general understanding that a post consisting of at least a regiment would be established here as soon as the necessary preparations for its accommodation could be made. If we could receive from the Department the assurance that it intended to establish a post of at least this size upon the site it would greatly aid us in bringing the matter to a close.[81]

In his reply, the Secretary of War refused to confirm the Chamber's push for a regimental post, writing, "I beg to inform you that the size of the garrison that will be required at the military post near Seattle cannot now be determined."[82] Undeterred, the Chamber of Commerce would continue pressuring the War Department to commit to a regimental post.

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[80] Records of the Board of Trustees Meetings, Seattle Chamber of Commerce, for July 28, 1896. FHLC, Box 2, Folder 4, SMA.
[81] Letter from E.O. Graves to the Secretary of War, July 28, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[82] Letter from the Acting Secretary of War to E.O. Graves, August 11, 1896. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 7, SMA.

The subject came up again in August 1897, when a delegation of army officials led by the Inspector General, J. C. Breckenridge, arrived in Seattle. The Chamber of Commerce escorted them to Magnolia Bluff, where they assessed the plans for the fort.[83] One of the junior officers, Captain C. P. Miller, remarked to a Chamber official that the army was planning to build a four-company post suitable for about three hundred soldiers rather than a regimental post. The President of the Chamber, E. O. Graves, dispatched an outraged letter to the Secretary of War, writing:

> I am directed by the Board of Trustees of the Chamber of Commerce to say that they have learned with astonishment and dismay that the policy of the War Department concerning the proposed army post on Magnolia Bluff is about to be reversed, and that instead of having a regimental post, as our citizens had been led to believe would be the case, we are likely to have only a post of four companies, or possibly less, and that the entire plans for the buildings, grounds, and approaches are to be modified accordingly. Our disappointment at the threatened reversal of policy, after our years of effort to comply in good faith with the requirements of the Department, is great and bitter.[84]

The Chamber's logic was curious: they castigated the War Department for not honoring a demand that had been explicitly rejected. The Secretary of War quieted the outrage with a brief telegram, stating, "I have had no other thought on the subject but to make Magnolia Bluff post a regimental one, and that is my present intention," which, practically, meant little.[85] Earlier, he had warned the Chamber of Commerce that with current resources, he could not foresee Magnolia Bluff hosting a regiment of soldiers, but the War Department never definitively stated how many troops would be stationed at the Fort. The Chamber of Commerce and its

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[83] "They Inspected the Artillery Site," August 23, 1897. *Seattle Daily Times.*
[84] Letter from the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to the Secretary of War, October 9, 1897. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[85] Telegram from the Secretary of War to the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, October 16, 1897. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.

congressional allies believed the War Department had broken a promise to them and kept up their demands for a regimental post for the following fourteen years.[86]

Construction on the new fort was completed in 1899 and was officially opened the following year. It was named Fort Lawton in honor of Major General Henry Ware Lawton, who was killed fighting in the Philippines.[87] In 1902, the Chamber of Commerce wrote the Board of Army Posts, urging them to station a regiment of troops at Fort Lawton.[88] They tried again in 1911, with Senator Samuel Piles urging the Secretary of War to increase the number of troops at the fort.[89] Unfortunately for the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Fort Lawton's limitations were becoming increasingly apparent.

Magnolia Bluff never became the linchpin in the coastal defense plan of Puget Sound. None of the heavy guns envisioned by the army to defend Seattle and Tacoma were ever emplaced. Part of the problem was the lack of a suitable wharf facility to transport heavy supplies. Neither of the two alternative dock sites acquired to replace the Salmon Bay frontage that belonged to the Scheuermans was viable. As a result, the army had to transport most supplies three miles over poorly maintained roads to Fort Lawton.[90] Also, the army determined that the pair of installations that defended the approaches to the lower Puget Sound were adequate

[86] Letter from Senator Samuel Piles to the Secretary of War, February 20, 1911. Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, Record Group 94, Box 6426, Folder 1753764, NARA.
[87] Now Fort Lawton," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* February 26, 1900.
[88] Letter from the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to the Board on army Posts, January 8, 1902. FHLC, Box 2, Folder 3, SMA.
[89] Letter from Senator Samuel Piles to the Secretary of War, February 20, 1911..
[90] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department* Vol. 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 41.

without placing guns at Fort Lawton.[91] By 1903, the army ceased stationing coastal artillery soldiers at Fort Lawton and designated it a four-company post for infantry soldiers.[92]

By 1916, Tacoma prevailed in the municipal competition to host an army base in Puget Sound. Updated army doctrine emphasized larger formations of troops, up to five thousand, stationed in one place. Fort Lawton was too small to meet the army's new emphasis on large forts with maneuver areas. American Lake, offered by the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce as an alternative to Magnolia Bluff in 1896, had been adopted by the army as a training area.[93] In 1916, Tacoma donated 70,000 acres to the army free of charge. It became Fort Lewis, which remains an active army base in 2025 and is home to tens of thousands of soldiers.

Despite their best efforts, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce was unable to overcome the limitations of geography. They handed over a small, hilly, and wooded plot of land without access to good anchorage. Fort Lawton's original mission as a coastal defense point became obsolete, and changing army doctrine prioritized large posts with maneuver training areas. The single-minded push for more soldiers at the fort underscores the Chamber's economic conception of military basing in the city, with its primary focus on generating profits.

Conclusion

The Seattle Chamber of Commerce gave the War Department a plot of land that the War Department found inadequate to serve as a regiment-sized post. As a result, the Chamber never

[91] Headquarters, Department of the Columbia, U.S. army, "Puget Sound Coastal Defenses Survey," November 12, 1907. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 10, SMA.
[92] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department* Vol. 3, 1903, 41.
[93] Letter from the Commanding General of the Western Division to the army Chief of Staff, October 14, 1916. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 10, SMA.

realized its ambitious projections for the post's impact on the local economy. The city's explosive growth was fueled in the succeeding years by trade linkages with Alaska and the Pacific, another Chamber initiative. Fort Lawton was a source of conflict instead of collaboration with Seattle. The Chamber interpreted its failed efforts to pressure the military to garrison a regiment of troops at the fort as a betrayal of an implicit agreement. But through their efforts to attract Fort Lawton, Seattle's elite showed their ambition for their growing city. They were willing to go to great lengths, both legally and morally, to accomplish a goal they believed would lead to future prosperity. In the case of Fort Lawton, however, they lacked an in-depth understanding of what the army needed for a new military post, both in land and in accommodation from local authorities, to become a large garrison of troops that would boost Seattle's businesses. Fort Lawton would continue to disrupt the Seattle business community's vision for their city.

CHAPTER TWO

"THESE ARE UNITED STATES TROOPS": THE PROGRESSIVE ERA ATTEMPT TO EXPEL BLACK SOLDIERS FROM SEATTLE

> Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on the earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States.
>
> - Frederick Douglass, 1863[1]

On the front page of the June 7th, 1910, edition of the *Seattle Daily Times* was a large black and white photograph of an African American soldier in his dress blue uniform. The brass buttons bearing the coat of arms of the United States shone on his chest. The crossed rifles of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment and the "U.S." insignia were pinned on his collar.[2] The soldier, Private Nathaniel Bledser, regards the camera with confidence and pride. The photograph could have humanized Bledser to the Seattle public if the newspaper had not placed above the image a banner that read, "Lawton's Negro Fiend."[3] Public outcry against African American soldiers in Seattle, led by real estate developers in the Interbay neighborhood adjacent to the army's Fort Lawton, was bolstered by support from the governor and the city's Congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. Bledser had been accused of assaulting a white woman, and the *Daily Times*

[1] Frederick Douglass, "Speech of Frederick Douglass," *Liberator (1831-1865),* July 24, 1863, 33, 30.
[2] David Cole, *Survey of U.S. army Uniforms, Weapons and Accoutrements* (U.S. army Center of Military History, 2007), 56-57.
[3] "Lawton's Negro Fiend," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 7, 1910.

was calling for the removal of all the African Americans of the Twenty-Fifth, part of the contingent of "Buffalo Soldiers" in the army. Despite the controversy, which continued for years after June 1910, the Twenty-Fifth completed a regular tour of duty at Fort Lawton and was transferred to Hawaii in 1913. The opponents of Black soldiers in Seattle expected that they could force the removal of the regiment from their city, as other cities had done before them. Why did their efforts fail when other cities--notably Brownsville, Texas--had succeeded in removing the Twenty-Fifth Regiment?


LAWTON'S NEGRO FIEND

Figure 4: army Private Nathaniel Bledser in his dress uniform, c1910. Source: Seattle Daily Times, June 7, 1910.

The Bledser Affair is an overlooked event in Seattle's history. Similarly, it is a counterexample to the prevailing narrative of the treatment of African American soldiers in the Progressive Era. President William Howard Taft reserved judgment on the conduct of African American soldiers in Seattle until a full investigation could be completed. Because of his forbearance, an injustice similar to the Brownsville Incident was avoided. While historians consider Taft's presidential term a mediocre interlude between Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, his judicial background guided his approach to the controversy surrounding allegations of misconduct by Black troops in Seattle.[4] Taft's decision to resist public and political pressure to immediately remove Black soldiers from Seattle during the Bledser Affair in June 1910 provided the space and time for the War Department to discover that real estate speculation was the principal driver of the controversy.

This chapter sits at the intersection of two bodies of literature: urban history and the history of African American soldiers. Scholars have studied the experience of African Americans in the United States Army between the end of the Civil War and the integration of the armed forces in 1948. A consistent pattern emerges: a segregated Black regiment was assigned to an army post near a community; an individual or group of soldiers was accused of a crime against a white resident; then the community, through violence or political pressure, forced the War Department to move the soldiers elsewhere.[5] Urban historians have documented the close

[4] William Howard Taft is among the least studied of American presidents. Louis L. Gould has written a valuable addition to the University Press of Kansas's American Presidency Series, *The William Howard Taft Presidency.* Gould argues that President Taft did as well as anyone could in the shadow of Theodore Roosevelt and with an unfavorable political climate. He lacked political acumen and made decisions in line with his natural temperament as a jurist rather than as the leader of a political party and Chief Executive of the United States. Gould does not address the Bledser Affair in his book. See Lewis L. Gould, *The William Howard Taft Presidency* (University Press of Kansas, 2009).

[5] See Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917* (Texas A & M University Press, 1995) and Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 1891-1917* (University of Missouri Press, 1974).

relationship between institutional racism and real estate profiteering.[6] Segregated African American regiments had been stationed in the West since the end of the Civil War, often far away from populated areas. However, the army's decision to establish bases, such as Fort Lawton, closer to urban centers in the last years of the nineteenth century sparked numerous confrontations between city leaders and the military. New Western historians have documented the troubled relations between white communities and African Americans.[7]

But scholars have yet to consider how the Bledser Affair was inconsistent with the pattern of interaction between Black soldiers and urban areas in the Progressive Era. President Taft treated the members of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment as soldiers deserving of due process rather than African Americans who threatened the white social order. His cautious approach was a departure from the harsher response of his predecessor Roosevelt, who discharged 167 Black soldiers from the army on dubious evidence in Brownsville in 1906, and his successor Wilson, who allowed thirteen African American soldiers to hang without being granted their constitutionally protected right to appeal their convictions in Houston in 1917. Additionally, the Bledser Affair is a significant milestone in Seattle's history, as Taft's decision was supported by citizens who resisted popular sentiment and affirmed the soldiers' conduct in the city as superior to that of the white regiments that preceded them. The city would continue to strive to welcome

[6] See Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*. (The University of Chicago Press, 1983), Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1996), and Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

[7] For New Western History, see Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (Norton, 1988), Richard White, "*It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), and Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (Norton, 1998).

all who wished to live there.[8] Once given the latitude to conduct a full investigation, army officials concluded that the Bledser Affair had been deliberately sensationalized by real estate speculators who wished to rid the Interbay neighborhood of Black residents. The War Department's records detail the immense pressure that Seattle's elite placed on the military to move the regiment elsewhere. The city's municipal archives and court records, supplemented by extensive local newspaper coverage, help determine the intentions of the pressure campaign beyond racial animus. Taft's decision to keep the regiment at Fort Lawton drew clear lines between city limits and the boundaries of a military base. Seattle's elite attempted to dictate who the army could station at Fort Lawton. The War Department demonstrated that it would utilize its military base, regardless of its impact on urban growth or social tensions, in whatever manner it chose.[9] The federal government under Taft avoided siding with Seattle's real estate interests against African Americans in uniform, defying the preceding pattern of conflict between cities and Buffalo Soldiers.

Echoes of Brownsville

African American soldiers served a country that often sent them to fight for the westward advance of the discriminatory social order. In the aftermath of the Civil War, Congress

[8] For a general history of Seattle, see Roger Sale, *Seattle: Past to Present* (University of Washington Press, 1976). For histories of Seattle's marginalized communities, see Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District, from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (University of Washington Press, 1994), Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (University of Washington Press, 2008), and Megan Asaka, *Seattle from the Margins : Exclusion, Erasure, and the Making of a Pacific Coast City* (University of Washington Press, 2022).

[9] For how the relationship between the military and cities developed on the West Coast, see Roger W. Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (Oxford University Press, 1992). For the relationship between the military and society in the Progressive Era, see Edward M. Coffman, *The Regulars: The American army, 1898-1941* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) and Paul A. C. Koistinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865-1919* (University Press of Kansas, 1997).

recognized the contributions of the thousands of Black soldiers who fought for the Union by creating four regiments of African American troops. From their creation in 1868 through the end of the century, Buffalo Soldiers would be deployed throughout the West to fight Indigenous groups resisting American expansion. They participated in campaigns against the Cheyennes in Kansas and the Comanches in Texas. They were present at Wounded Knee when white troops from the Seventh Cavalry massacred Lakota adherents of the Ghost Dance religion in 1890. Despite their service in oppressing Indigenous people in the West, Black troops themselves were victims of racial exclusion, intimidation, and murder. Three soldiers were lynched by a vigilante group in Kansas in 1867, and another in Dakota Territory in 1885. Some communities, like Salt Lake City, objected to posting Black regiments nearby.[10] In Texas, Black soldiers were expelled from Laredo, Rio Grande City, and El Paso after violent clashes between soldiers and local civilians.[11]

In 1906, soldiers from the Twenty-Fifth Infantry were posted to Brownsville, Texas. Shortly after midnight on August 14, someone fired a barrage of rifle shots into the town, killing a bartender and wounding the police chief.[12] A mass meeting was held in Brownsville the following day, and a committee of citizens wrote to President Roosevelt. They claimed that an "attack made on this city by negro troops," numbering between twenty and thirty soldiers, had fired about 200 rounds into the city indiscriminately.[13] They wrote:

> Our condition, Mr. President, is this: Our women and children are terrorized and our men are practically under constant alarm and watchfulness. No community can stand this

[10] Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 164-191.
[11] Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas*, 16-68.
[12] United States Senate, "Summary Discharge or Mustering Out of Regiments and Companies," December 19, 1906. 59th Congress, 2d Session, Document No. 155, 21.
[13] United States Senate, "Summary Discharge or Mustering Out of Regiments and Companies," 20-21.

> strain for more than a few days. We look to you for relief; we ask you to have the troops at once removed from Fort Brown and replaced by white soldiers.[14]

On August 20, after a brief initial investigation, the troops were removed from Brownsville, and the fort was closed.[15]

In October, the War Department ordered the army's Inspector General to investigate the incident fully. Brigadier General Ernest A. Garlington, a Medal of Honor recipient from the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890, was given specific instructions from President Roosevelt:[16]

> The President further authorizes you to make known to those concerned that unless such enlisted men of the 25th Infantry as may have knowledge of the facts relating to the shooting, killing, and riotous conduct on the part of the men with the organizations serving at Fort Brown, Texas, on the night of the 13th of August, 1906, report to you such facts, and all other circumstances within their knowledge which will assist in apprehending the guilty parties, orders will be immediately issued from the War Department discharging every man in Companies B, C, and D, of the 25th Infantry, without honor, and forever disbarring them from re-enlisting in the army or Navy of the United States, as well as from employment in any civil capacity under the government.[17]

Garlington's investigation noted that a Brownsville grand jury had declined to indict the soldiers arrested in the aftermath of the shooting for lack of evidence. Additionally, there was no proof that the regiment's soldiers were involved at all. At first, the soldiers believed their fort was under attack from local residents, who had violently assaulted two soldiers in the previous week and barred the soldiers from entering saloons and other establishments. Within minutes of the

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[14] United States Senate, "Summary Discharge or Mustering Out of Regiments and Companies," 21.
[15] United States Senate, "Summary Discharge or Mustering Out of Regiments and Companies," 35.
[16] United States Senate, *Medal of Honor Recipients, 1863-1978*, February 14, 1979. 96th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Committee Print No. 3, 284.
[17] Letter of Instruction from the Secretary of War to Brig. Gen. E.A. Garlington, October 4, 1906. Records of the Office of the Inspector General, Record Group 159 (RG 159), Box 112, Folder 11118, The National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. (NARA).

shooting, the officers of the regiment mustered the soldiers and found all of them present and accounted for. The regiment's rifles were found clean (indicating they had not been fired) and locked in their racks. However, the President's orders to the Inspector General made it clear what he expected him to do. General Garlington, through coercion and threat, attempted to elicit the identity of the shooters from the soldiers. The soldiers swore they did not know the perpetrators' identities, which Garlington attributed to "the secretive nature of the race."[18] In compliance with Roosevelt's instructions, Garlington recommended the discharge of the soldiers stationed at Brownsville at the time of the incident.[19]

Congress launched an investigation after President Roosevelt discharged the entire battalion of 167 troops. Despite the absence of evidence linking any of the soldiers to the shooting, President Roosevelt's letter to Congress was adamant in the rightness of his decision. He stated,

> The evidence proves conclusively that a number of the soldiers engaged in a deliberate and concerted attack, as cold blooded as it was cowardly; the purpose being to terrorize the community, and to kill or injure men, women, and children in their homes and beds or on the streets, and this at an hour of the night when concerted or effective resistance or defense was out of the question, and when detection by identification of the criminals in the United States uniform was well-nigh impossible.[20]

To Roosevelt, the possibility that a soldier could have committed the shooting was enough to condemn the entire battalion. The stain of Roosevelt's decision would follow the Twenty-Fifth Infantry in the future. Reconstituted with new soldiers--including a private from Missouri named

[18] Inspector General of the United States Army's Report of Investigation, October 22, 1906. RG 159, Box 112, Folder 11118, NARA.
[19] Inspector General of the United States Army's Report of Investigation, October 22, 1906.
[20] United States Senate, "Summary Discharge or Mustering Out of Regiments and Companies," 5.

Nathaniel Bledser--the unit was sent to the Philippines in 1907.[21] The regiment spent two years patrolling the island of Mindanao, occasionally fighting the remnants of Filipino resistance to American occupation.[22]

After their deployment overseas, the Twenty-Fifth was transferred to Fort Lawton in Seattle in October 1909.[23] Fort Lawton was one of the newer army posts and exemplified the trend of concentrating troops from Indian War-era outposts to larger bases near western cities. In 1894, the army recognized the need for increased facilities in Puget Sound for coastal defense and rapid response to urban unrest.[24] Seattle's Chamber of Commerce organized and funded an effort to purchase Magnolia Bluff, a promontory over the Sound northwest of downtown Seattle. After several years of effort, the Chamber of Commerce presented the plot of land to the army in 1898.[25] Fort construction was completed in 1899.[26] The fort was named after Henry Ware Lawton, an army general who had been killed fighting in the Philippines.[27]

Before the Twenty-Fifth's arrival, Seattle's newspapers reported that the inbound regiment was the same unit that had "shot up" Brownsville and that residents in the Interbay neighborhood, adjacent to Fort Lawton, would oppose the posting.[28] Still, the regiment's record of service in the Philippines, characterized by the *Seattle Daily Times* as "exterminating

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[21] Bledser, Nathaniel, 1907. *Register of Enlistments in the U.S. army, 1798-1914,* Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, Record Group 94 (RG 94), Microfilm Publication M233, page 108, NARA.
[22] John H. Nankivell, ed, *History of the Twenty-Fifth Regiment, United States Infantry, 1869-1926* (The Smith-Brooks Printing Company, 1927), 121-131.
[23] "Sheridan Arrives with Negro Troops," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 5, 1909.
[24] United States War Department, *Annual Reports of the War Department* (Government Printing Office, 1894), 150-151.
[25] Quartermaster General of the army to Constructing Quartermaster Capt. W.W. Robinson, Jr., March 15, 1898. Fort Lawton History Collection (FLHC), Box 1, Folder 9, Seattle Municipal Archives (SMA).
[26] David Chance, *The Evolution of Intent at Fort Lawton* (Geo-Recon International, 1984), 38-41.
[27] Headquarters of the army, "General Order No. 20," February 19, 1900. FLHC, Box 1, Folder 10, SMA.
[28] "Dislike Regiment's Record in Texas," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 16, 1909.

insurgents and traitors to the American flag," was celebrated when they arrived in the city.[29] For the following nine months, there were no significant incidents between the Black soldiers and the residents of Seattle.

An Assault, Then an Uproar

On the late Saturday afternoon of June 4, 1910, around 5:30 to 5:45 p.m., Amanda Redding was in the yard of her house in the Interbay neighborhood. According to her statement given to military investigators later that evening, an African American soldier wearing a blue uniform with a brown undershirt approached her and asked for something to eat. They spoke for several minutes about his desire to leave the army and return home. After she declined to prepare food for him, the soldier pushed her into the house and attempted to rape her.[30] During the assault, the assailant bit into her lower lip, causing a "concave wound…3/4" wide and 1/2" long," according to the army doctor who examined her.[31] Hearing their mother's cries for help, Eva and Ethel Redding, eleven and nine years old respectively, came into the house during the assault, at which point the soldier fled. Amanda Redding ran to a neighbor's house, real estate agent Thomas Mackay, for help. According to Redding and her daughters, the soldier was tall, slender, and clean-shaven. He smelled like liquor but was not drunk. They believed they would be able to recognize the assailant if they saw him again.[32]

[29] "Sheridan Arrives with Negro Troops."
[30] Statement of Mrs. Amanda Redding, June 4, 1910. Records of the army Continental Commands 1821-1920, Record Group 393 (RG 393), Box 23, Folder 6763, NARA.
[31] Statement of 1st Lt. Ira C. Brown, June 7, 1910. RG 393, Box 23, Folder 6763, NARA.
[32] Statements of Amanda, Eva, and Ethel Redding, June 4, 1910. RG 393, Box 23, Folder 6763, NARA.

Earlier in the afternoon, a group of soldiers from "B" Company left Fort Lawton and picked up their boat stored by the Salmon Bay ferry operator, Gus Carlson. They crossed the bay to visit a brothel and met two other soldiers at the establishment, Hollie Giles and Nathaniel Bledser of "D" Company. Both Giles and Bledser were already drunk when they met the soldiers of "B" Company, according to sworn statements administered by army officers. Around 4:00 p.m., the soldiers took the boat back to Carlson's dock, and the ferryman transported the group southwards across Salmon Bay to a landing near Fort Lawton. The soldiers split into two groups as they walked back to the fort, and Bledser's whereabouts were unaccounted for by the time they arrived at the barracks. They reached Fort Lawton by the 5:00 p.m. bugle call announcing the Recall formation.[33] Two soldiers gave sworn statements that situated Bledser, heavily intoxicated and barely able to stand, on Fort Lawton at the time of the assault on Redding.[34] At some point that evening, Bledser left Fort Lawton without authorization and remained in the city until after midnight. Bledser was questioned about his whereabouts at the time of the assault when he returned to Fort Lawton.[35]

[33] Statement of Private Nathaniel Bledser, June 6, 1910; Statement of Musician Hollie Giles, June 9, 1910; Statement of Artificer Benjamin H. Gilmore, June 8, 1910; Statement of Corporal Joseph Jasper, June 9, 1910; Statement of Private Mathis Jefferson, June 9, 1910; Statement of Corporal John Thomas, June 9, 1910. RG 393, Box 23, Folder 6763, NARA.
[34] Statement of Private Maurice S. Carter, June 14, 1910; Statement of Private Shepherd Kinnard, June 14, 1910. RG 393, Box 23, Folder 6763, NARA.
[35] Letter from 2nd Lt. R.P. Harbold to Fort Lawton Adjutant, June 6, 1910. RG 393, Box 23, Folder 6763, NARA.

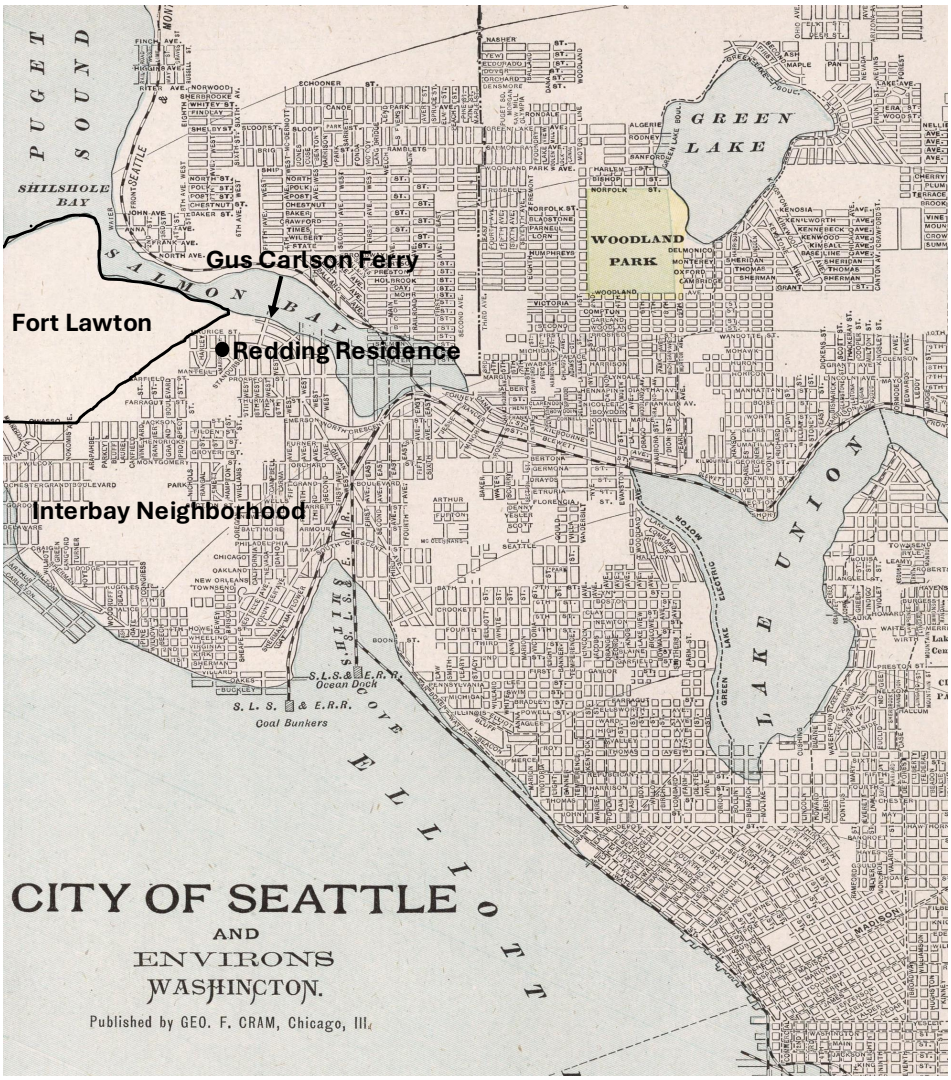

Figure 5 Landmarks of the Bledser Affair. Source: "City of Seattle and Environs, Washington." Published by George F. Cram, Chicago, Ill. (to accompany) Cram's Atlas of the World, Ancient and Modern: 1901. Notations by Author.

The Commander of "D" Company, Capt. W.G. Doane, launched an investigation into the assault the following day. Redding and her daughters were brought to Fort Lawton to attempt to identify the assailant. Doane and the Reddings questioned and examined the nine soldiers known to have been absent from the post on the afternoon of the assault. All of the soldiers could prove they were not in the vicinity of Redding's house at the time of the assault, except for Nathaniel Bledser, who gave inconsistent answers during questioning. Capt. Doane attributed the inconsistencies to Bledser's intoxication the previous day, not as an attempt to avoid being

identified as the assailant. According to Doane, Redding and her daughters examined Bledser three times and did not identify him as the assailant. Bledser, "heavy set and medium height," did not match the description Redding and her daughters provided the previous evening. Further, he had a mustache and had worn a white shirt underneath his tunic rather than a brown one on the day of the assault.[36]

According to the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, Bledser had deceived the Reddings by waxing his mustache.[37] After ferryman Gus Carlson identified the group that he had rowed across Salmon Bay around an hour before the assault, Bledser and six other soldiers were brought to the Redding house on Tuesday morning, June 7, and the victim identified him as her assailant.[38] The army then turned Bledser over to the Seattle police for prosecution in civilian court.[39] After failing to identify Bledser as the perpetrator on at least three previous occasions, the Reddings may have been influenced by Carlson's account of rowing the soldiers to the dock near their house. However, there was a discrepancy of nearly an hour between when the soldiers landed back on the Fort Lawton side of Salmon Bay and the time of the assault fixed by Redding. Besides his mustache, Bledser was a different height and weight than the assailant's description. All the sworn statements provided by soldiers who had been with him on the afternoon of June 4 assert that Bledser was heavily intoxicated throughout the afternoon, also at variance with Redding's account of the conversation with her assailant before the attack. Public outrage regarding the attack, however, had reached a fever pitch in the intervening days between the assault and Bledser's arrest, and the pressure to find a culprit was high.

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[36] Letter from Capt. W.G. Doane to Fort Lawton Adjutant, June 5, 1910. RG 393, Box 23, Folder 6763, NARA.
[37] "Negro Soldier Held Prisoner; People Aroused," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 6, 1910.
[38] "Negro Soldier Identified by Woman Victim," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 7, 1910.
[39] "Negro Soldier Held Prisoner; People Aroused."

The residents of the Interbay neighborhood adjacent to the fort held a mass meeting on the evening of June 6. They passed a resolution characterizing the soldiers as "unworthy of trust, and a danger and menace to peaceful, law-abiding citizens."[40] Subsequently, the Seattle City Council endorsed their resolution, adding, "This body recommends the withdrawal of this colored regiment from Fort Lawton, for the welfare of and as the only safe means of guarding the community."[41] Interbay's community leaders dispatched letters and telegrams to Washington's two Senators, three Congressmen, and the state's governor, demanding the removal of Black soldiers from Seattle. In their letter to Representative Miles Poindexter, they threatened mob violence against the soldiers if they were not removed from Seattle, writing:

> Unless the conditions are quickly changed by the removal of these troops, we must expect the inevitable to follow---that the men of our district will give way to overwrought passion, fanned beyond reason by the mere sight of these soldiers, and commit that which our most lawabiding citizens are anxious to avoid."[42]

Upon receiving the Interbay Committee's telegram, Senator Wesley Jones resolved to see President Taft personally to convince him to remove the Twenty-Fifth from Seattle.[43]

The publisher of one of Seattle's leading newspapers, the *Daily Times*, provided the most reactionary response to the arrest of Nathaniel Bledser. Alden J. Blethen moved to Seattle in 1896 after failing as a newspaper publisher in Kansas City and Minneapolis. Learning from his past setbacks, Blethen reversed the declining fortunes of the *Daily Times,* which, under his leadership, became a popular pro-business, pro-urban development daily. He earned a reputation

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[40] Interbay Resolution, June 6, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662218, NARA.
[41] Seattle City Council Resolution 2821, June 6, 1910. City Council Resolutions, 1801-09, SMA.
[42] Letter from Interbay Committee to Representative Miles Poindexter, June 7, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1665174, NARA.
[43] Telegram from Secretary of War J.M. Dickerson to Senator Wesley L. Jones, June 8, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662445. NARA.

for publishing vitriolic editorials in the pages of his newspaper.[44] A rival publisher, Harry Chadwick of *The Argus*, detested Blethen for his politics and sensationalist reporting, often heavy on innuendo and light on facts. He called Blethen an "emblem of God's carelessness and man's depravity."[45]

In his editorial published on June 7, 1910, titled "Let the Colored Troops be Withdrawn," Blethen condemned the Black soldiers at Fort Lawton and urged their immediate expulsion from Seattle. Blethen characterized the Twenty-Fifth's assignment to Fort Lawton as a mistake that he and others had sought to prevent. He wrote, "Although this protest was brought to the attention of the highest officials in Washington through the proper channels, no attention was paid thereto—and largely on the ground that it was claimed that the record of the colored soldiers both in times of peace and war had been equal to that of the white soldier when judged from the standpoint of civilized conduct."[46] On the same day as Blethen's editorial, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce sent a telegram to Representative Will E. Humphrey reminding him of the promise he had made to the business community to secure the removal of the Twenty-Fifth from Seattle if the soldiers "imperil[ed] [the] safety of residents of neighborhood [next to Fort Lawton]."[47] They demanded that he make good on his commitment.

Blethen's editorial went on to describe an escalating series of episodes and crimes associated with Black soldiers that culminated in the attack on Amanda Redding. None of the alleged precipitating crimes were reported in either his newspaper or the competitor *Post-*

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[44] Sharon A. Boswell and Lorraine McConaghy, *Raise Hell and Sell Newspapers: Alden J. Blethen & the Seattle Times* (Washington State University Press, 1996), 106-166.
[45] *The Argus,* February 12, 1898, quoted in Boswell and McConaghy, *Raise Hell and Sell Newspapers,* 106.
[46] Alden J. Blethen, "Let the Colored Troops be Withdrawn," *Seattle Daily Times,* June 7, 1910.
[47] Telegram from Seattle Chamber of Commerce to Representative Will E. Humphrey, June 7, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662445, NARA.

Intelligencer. Blethen never named Nathaniel Bledser; the "negro soldier" sufficed.[48] He used the attack to elucidate his views on the biological superiority of white people. Blethen said the assault "so disfigured her [Amanda Redding's] face as to make her conspicuous for life, if indeed the assault does not prove fatal through blood poisoning."[49] Eugenic racism, often expressed in state laws like the "One Drop Rule," was accepted and popular with contemporary white Americans from across the political spectrum. Many, like Blethen, believed that "Anglo-Saxons" were in positions of power due to the superiority of their blood.[50]

He urged immediate action by city leadership to remove the regiment from the city. Blethen insisted the War Department "use the colored troop in the extreme South, among the people with whom they were raised, and who know them and their peculiarities, and who deal with their barbarities in a prompt and energetic manner."[51] In his view, if the citizens of Seattle were not willing to lynch Nathaniel Bledser and other Black soldiers for perceived transgressions against the white social order, then the troops needed to be sent to a place where Black people were frequently murdered for transgressing racial lines.[52]

Other Seattle newspapers weighed in on the controversy. The *Post-Intelligencer* wrote:

> So far as Seattle is concerned, it has no prejudice against colored soldiers as such. On the contrary, the patriotism and bravery of the colored soldier is recognized. But so far as Seattle is concerned, the Twenty-Fifth infantry has outlived its usefulness here. It is hard to say to the good men and good soldiers, of whom there are doubtless many in the regiment, they are no longer welcome. More than that their continued presence now creates a great danger. The colored troops must go.[53]

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[48] Blethen, "Let the Colored Troops be Withdrawn."
[49] Blethen, "Let the Colored Troops be Withdrawn."
[50] Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America,* new ed. (Oxford University Press, 1997), 84-122.
[51] Blethen, "Let the Colored Troops be Withdrawn."
[52] Blethen, "Let the Colored Troops be Withdrawn."
[53] "The Colored Troops Must Go," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 8, 1910.

Horace Cayton, the publisher of the city's African American newspaper, the *Republican*, wrote that he was concerned that the actions of one soldier would lead the city's residents to condemn the entire Black population. He reminded his readers that the African American community in Seattle had been present since the city's founding and had enjoyed relatively good relations with the white community.[54]

In spite of Cayton's pleas, violence between Black soldiers and white Seattleites seemed imminent. The Interbay neighborhood organized a vigilance committee and warned Black residents, including those with no connection to Fort Lawton, that it was unwise for them to be on the streets.[55] The commander of Fort Lawton, Lt. Col. Samuel W. Miller, ordered all soldiers confined to the base.[56] Within a few days of the attack on Mrs. Redding, Seattle Mayor Hirum Gill dispatched a force of thirty police officers to patrol Interbay.[57] A police officer later beat a Black soldier within the confines of the fort, prompting a stern protest from the Fort Lawton commanding officer, who reminded Mayor Gill that the base was beyond his police's jurisdiction.[58] According to Seattle's leaders, the threat of intercommunal violence was all the justification President Taft would need to remove the Twenty-Fifth from the city.[59]

The Equitable Jurist

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[54] "Fort Lawton's Negro Soldiers," *Seattle Republican*, June 10, 1910.
[55] "Bledser Eager to Get Inside Penitentiary," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 9, 1910.
[56] Telegram from Lt. Col. S.W. Miller to Adjutant General of the army, June 8, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662207, NARA.
[57] "Police Guarding Interbay, Troops Cooped in Fort," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 7, 1910.
[58] "Col Evans vs. Mayor Gill," *Seattle Republican*, September 9, 1910.
[59] Letter from Interbay Committee to Representative Will E. Humphrey, June 7, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1664218, NARA.

Senator Wesley Jones, armed with Interbay's telegram, saw President Taft at the White House on the morning of June 8th. The Secretary of War, ex-Confederate soldier Jacob M. Dickinson, also joined the meeting. While a transcript of the meeting has not been preserved, it is clear, based on a subsequent telegram from Dickinson to Jones, that the senator had urged the President to remove the Twenty-Fifth from Seattle as soon as possible, much like President Roosevelt had done with the Twenty-Fifth in Brownsville in 1906.[60] The President did not need much time to reach a decision. Later in the day, he dispatched a letter to Secretary Dickinson:

> My dear Mr. Secretary:
>
> Referring to the telegram handed to you by Senator Jones with reference to the troops of the 25th Infantry stationed at Fort Lawton, and the demand in the telegram for their immediate withdrawal because of alleged crimes by some of their number in the neighborhood, I am very clear that the request can not be complied with. If there are any members of the regiment who have violated the law, they ought to be apprehended and turned over to the local authorities for punishment. The necessary discipline of the regiment and the interests of the community require that the investigation should be as thorough and as prompt as possible. These are United States troops and are to be stationed and housed in the United States, and it is the business of the War Department to see that they make as little disturbance as possible, wherever they are put; and I have no doubt that your orders and those of the colonel commanding will effect such a result. To remove them now on charges which are not sustained by any evidence produced to you, would be merely to impose on another community persons with respect to whom had been made but not yet proved, and might properly arose a protest from the new community. Until the question of the charges made is thoroughly investigated in the neighborhood where the troops now are, where witnesses are present and complete proof can be taken, the removal of the troops might not only withdraw witnesses, but possibly the guilty parties, from the jurisdiction of the court over crimes alleged to have been committed.[61]

[60] Telegram from Secretary of War J.M. Dickerson to Senator Wesley L. Jones, June 8, 1910.
[61] Letter from President William H. Taft to Secretary of War J.M. Dickinson, June 8, 1910. *William H. Taft Papers: Series 8: Letterbooks, 1872 to 1921; Presidential; Vol. 16,1910 May 29-June 23*, Library of Congress (LC).

Complying with the President's instructions, Secretary Dickinson ordered the army to carry out a complete investigation of the incident.[62]

Taft's letter firmly rejected the possibility of moving the Twenty-Fifth from Seattle on account of the Bledser Affair before a thorough investigation was conducted. Further, he gave the soldiers a measure of respect that the Interbay Committee, newspaper publisher Alden Blethen, and others had not. Nowhere in the letter does he refer to the ethnicity of the soldiers stationed at Fort Lawton. He grounded their identity in the country they served. When Roosevelt removed Black soldiers from Brownsville and several other communities during his presidency, Taft, as Secretary of War, had to carry out the orders. As president, he diverged from his predecessor in his equitable treatment of African American soldiers. Later in the summer, when he appointed Whitefield McKinlay as Collector of Customs in Washington, D.C., he told McKinlay in his letter of congratulations that: "My attitude toward your race has, I sometimes think, been misunderstood or misrepresented, but I am confident that as time passes my position will be more clearly understood."[63]

Taft's relatively progressive views on race went unnoticed because of his growing rift with Theodore Roosevelt and declining political fortunes. The Republicans lost the House of Representatives in the 1910 midterm elections and barely held on to the Senate. Roosevelt sought the Republican nomination in the 1912 elections and ran as a third-party candidate when he lost the nomination to Taft. Both men lost in the general election to Democratic nominee Woodrow Wilson, who, as President, allowed his cabinet officials to segregate their departments

[62] Letter from the Adjutant General of the army to the Commanding Officer, Fort Lawton, WA, June 8, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662284, NARA.
[63] Letter from President William H. Taft to Whitefield McKinlay, August 13, 1910. *William H. Taft Papers: Series 3: General Correspondence and Related Material, 1877-1941*, LC.

and agencies in the federal government.[64] Wilson's War Department did not include the four African American Regiments in the American Expeditionary Force deployed to France during World War I. When Buffalo Soldiers fought back against an approaching white mob after weeks of tensions in Houston, Texas, in 1917, thirteen soldiers were convicted of crimes related to the riot. They were hanged within two weeks of their convictions without an opportunity to appeal. The regiment was immediately transferred to the Philippines after the riot.[65]

In the weeks following the assault on Amanda Redding, many in Seattle were outraged by Taft's decision. The Interbay Committee believed that the President did not understand the seriousness of the situation.[66] They dispatched more telegrams and letters to political allies to pressure Taft to reverse his decision. Washington's Governor telegraphed the Secretary of War, asking that the troops be removed from Fort Lawton and that a separate element of Buffalo Soldiers stationed at Fort George Wright in the eastern part of the state be removed as well.[67] The Interbay Committee sent Senator Samuel Piles nine affidavits from "women or their husbands" on alleged offenses against the social order. They included allegations that a Black soldier had said, "Good evening, sweetheart" to a white woman, another frightened a woman by walking behind her, and a third Black soldier threatened a woman's sense of safety by walking by her house near Fort Lawton several times.[68] The Seattle Chamber of Commerce forwarded an anonymous letter to Representative Humphrey that suggested that a white regiment replace the

[64] Kathleen L. Wolgemuth, "Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation," *The Journal of Negro History* 44, no. 2 (1959): 158.
[65] Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas,* 161-178.
[66] Telegram from Interbay Committee to Senator Samuel Piles, June 14, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1665038, NARA.
[67] Telegram from Washington Governor M.E. Hay to Secretary of War Dickinson, June 9, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662207, NARA.
[68] Letter with Nine Affidavits from the Interbay Committee to Senator Samuel Piles, June 13, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1665038, NARA.

Twenty-Fifth in Seattle.[69] Former Tennessee Congressman William Prosser, who had moved to Seattle, wrote Taft a letter urging him not only to remove the Twenty-Fifth from the city but to discharge all the African American soldiers in the army. He wrote:

> As the Anglo-Saxon race occupies the leading place in the procession of the nations of the world, I believe that, in order to maintain that position, which is important to the entire world, it should in the first place, preserve its purity and high character; and, in the second place, it should administer the affairs of government as far as possible, through its own members, or through men of the highest available character. Every soldier in the U.S. Army should be worthy of recognition at the same time, as gentlemen, and this is not possible as long as colored troops are employed in that arm of the public service.[70]

Facing a difficult midterm election, Taft could have taken a politically popular position and expelled the Twenty-Fifth from Seattle. However, the narrative crafted by the Interbay Committee and others began to crack.

Coming from a range of perspectives, some Seattleites spoke out in support of the Buffalo Soldiers, refuting allegations that they posed a threat to public safety. Former Mayor Byron Phelps wrote Secretary of War Dickinson the following:

> From personal observation daily the Twenty-Fifth Infantry has deported itself equally as well, if not better, than any troop stationed there, and there is no cause for their removal. There is no excitement here at all, our newspapers have simply gone off the handle with out [sic] investigation, and so admit to me.[71]

[69] Letter from Seattle Chamber of Commerce to Representative Will E. Humphrey, June 14, 1910. RG 94, Box 5886, Folder 1666904, NARA.
[70] Letter from William Prosser to President William H. Taft, July 16, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1677473, NARA.
[71] Letter from Byron Phelps to Secretary of War Dickinson, June 8, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662284, NARA.

His criticism reached *Daily Times* publisher Alden Blethen, who telegraphed the Secretary of War to refute Phelps' claim that his newspaper had stoked fear among Seattleites as an "absolute falsehood."[72] Another local newspaper, the *Rainier Valley Record*, published an editorial calling for a rejection of hysteria and a return to common sense among the residents of Seattle. It recounted the honorable service of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry over the past four decades. It stated that Seattle had an opportunity to treat Black soldiers more equitably than Brownsville had.[73] A Union veteran of the Civil War wrote the Secretary of War to express his opinion that the clamor to remove Black soldiers from Seattle was a "big mistake."[74] A counter-narrative had formed that while a soldier of the regiment had probably violently assaulted Redding, the entire body of troops should not be held responsible on account of race.

Seattle's police records bolster former Mayor Phelps' contention that the Black soldiers had conducted themselves as well as or better than white regiments. The Police Chief's annual reports to the City Council broke down crime statistics by profession. In 1908, the year before the Twenty-Fifth arrived and a white regiment, the Third, was at Fort Lawton, seventy-six soldiers were arrested for various crimes in the city.[75] In 1910, the year of the Bledser Affair, the number of arrests of soldiers had dropped to sixty.[76] In 1913, the year another white regiment came to replace the Twenty-Fifth, the number of crimes committed by soldiers increased to

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[72] Telegram from Alden Blethen to Secretary of War Dickinson, June 22, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1667722, NARA.
[73] "Hysteria Over Negro Soldiers," *Rainier Valley Record*, June 10, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1664218, NARA.
[74] Letter from Major Cicero Newell to Secretary of War Dickinson, June 13, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662207, NARA.
[75] Seattle Police Department, "Report of Police Department, January 1st, 1908, to November 30th, 1908." Office of City Clerk Annual Reports– Police, 1802-H8, Box 1, Folder 5, SMA.
[76] Seattle Police Department, "Annual Report Seattle Police Department, November 30th, 1909, to December 1st, 1910." Office of City Clerk Annual Reports– Police, 1802-H8, Box 1, Folder 5, SMA.

eighty-eight.[77] According to the police department's statistics, African American soldiers committed fewer crimes in the city than white soldiers.

In Nathaniel Bledser's case, refuting the fiction that Black soldiers committed more crimes was not enough to save him from conviction despite numerous inconsistencies and police misconduct. After being turned over to the Seattle Police, he was forced to confess to assaulting Redding under threat of being lynched and without a lawyer present.[78] The presiding judge threw out the coerced admission and appointed a counsel to defend Private Bledser, who retracted his confession and pled not guilty.[79] After a two-day trial in September 1910, Bledser was found guilty by an all-white jury after thirty minutes of deliberation and sentenced to four years in Walla Walla State Penitentiary.[80] After release, he returned to the Midwest and died in Missouri in 1968.[81]

As he did in Brownsville in 1906, Inspector General Garlington conducted a full investigation of the Bledser Affair. This time, however, he was not dispatched with instructions on how the investigation should proceed, as he was in 1906 by President Roosevelt. He and his officers examined the allegations of crimes against the residents of Seattle and found little concrete evidence of misconduct beyond the assault on Redding. An early draft of his report stated, "The fact came out that many respectable white women of Seattle had been insulted by

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[77] Seattle Police Department, "Annual Report of the Police Department of the City of Seattle, Washington. From December 1st, 1912, to November 30th, 1913." Office of City Clerk Annual Reports– Police, 1802-H8, Box 1, Folder 5, SMA.
[78] "Bledser Eager to Get Inside Penitentiary." *Seattle Daily Times*. June 9, 1910.
[79] "Taft Declines Flatly to Move Negro Soldiers," *Seattle Times*, June 8, 1910.; "Negro Refuses to Plead Guilty as He Promised," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 10, 1910.
[80] *State of Washington v. Nathaniel Bledser*, File Number 5373 (Sup. Court of the State of WA for King County, 1910); "Description of Convict: Nathaniel Bledser," August 2, 1914. Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla.
[81] "Standard Certificate of Death: Nathaniel Bledser," February 13, 1968, State file no. 68 0001946, Missouri Division of Health.

soldiers of the 25th Infantry."[82] It was edited in the final report that went to the Secretary of War to read, "It was alleged that many respectable white women of Seattle had been insulted by soldiers of the 25th Infantry."[83] While Garlington had shown clear bias against African American soldiers in his Brownsville report, the testimony of former Mayor Phelps, the *Rainier Valley Record,* and others complicated the early draft's harder stance. He reviewed the statements for and against the soldiers, including a letter from a white woman, Anna Lowe, who gave the soldiers "a certificate of good character."[84] Unlike his report on the Brownsville Incident, General Garlington did not make a recommendation for future action. He merely summarized the evidence gathered during the investigation and noted the President's previous decision to keep the Twenty-Fifth at Fort Lawton.

After reviewing the report, the Secretary of War ordered the investigation closed without further action against the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, which would remain in Seattle for another two and a half years.[85] In light of evidence that affirmed the soldiers' good conduct in Seattle outside of the assault on Redding, it is likely that the Secretary did not believe he had enough justification to convince President Taft to overturn his decision to keep the soldiers at Fort Lawton. More importantly, during the investigation, the army discovered the underlying motive to expel the Twenty-Fifth from Seattle: real estate speculation.

Real Estate Men

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[82] Draft Inspector General's Memorandum, Case Number 14633, September 13, 1910. RG 159, Box 112, Folder 11118, NARA.
[83] Inspector General's Memorandum, September 15, 1910. RG 159, Box 112, Folder 11118, NARA.
[84] Inspector General's Memorandum, September 15, 1910.
[85] Memorandum from the Office of the Chief of Staff to the Adjutant General, October 17, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1700024, NARA.

When Fort Lawton was constructed in 1898-99, it was situated in a sparsely populated area of the city. The terrain was densely forested, with a 300-foot rise in elevation to Magnolia Bluff.[86] Seattle's commercial center was six miles south and separated by a series of hills that rendered travel difficult. Few roads and no city services were available. For Seattle's business community, it was an ideal location to offer to the army for a fort—close enough to provide some economic benefits while occupying relatively cheap land.

The following decade was eventful. By 1910, the surrounding Interbay neighborhood had grown quickly. Increased international trade to Asia and the Klondike Gold Rush in Alaska brought economic prosperity and tens of thousands of new residents to Seattle. In twenty years, the city's population had increased by over 550 percent from 42,837 in 1890 to 237,194 in 1910.[87] City Engineer R. H. Thomson, seeking to expand the city's downtown, embarked on an ambitious terraforming project to remove several hills that impeded urban development. Using hydraulic water cannons, his workers removed as much as 50 million cubic yards of earth and created a north-south economic corridor accommodating the city's expansion.[88] Interbay was no longer on the outskirts.

Fort Lawton also contributed to the economic growth of the neighborhood. The Seattle city government and business community provided several incentives to persuade the army to locate the new fort in the Puget Sound region near their city, rather than in its competitors, Tacoma and Olympia. The city promised to run a water main to the fort and offer water at a

[86] Report of army Fortifications Board, January 29, 1896. FLHC, Box 1, Folder 7, SMA.
[87] Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District, from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era,* 296.
[88] Matthew W. Klingle, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (Yale University Press, 2007), 86-104.

discounted rate of three cents per thousand gallons.[89] The West Street and North End Electric Railway Company committed to providing a trolley line directly to the fort, connecting it to downtown Seattle.[90] A branch line was constructed off the north-south Ballard line that made several stops westward before it looped at Fort Lawton's gate and returned to downtown.[91] The military granted a right-of-way for the city to run a sewer main under the fort reservation that drained the city's sewage into the Sound.[92] Although the fort primarily benefited from the projects, the Interbay neighborhood gained city water, public transportation, and sewage systems. Real estate speculators attempted to profit from the developments.

One such speculator was David Eastman. In the summer of 1907, he ran a half-page advertisement in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* advertising lots for sale on Magnolia Bluff. Offering free automobile tours for interested customers, the advertisement predicted that all empty lots would soon be bought on the picturesque bluff, which now included a scenic drive as part of the city's new park system.[93] Eastman was one of nine members, six of whom were real estate agents, of the Interbay Committee leadership that had led the effort to remove the Twenty-Fifth from Seattle.[94]

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[89] Letter from the City of Seattle to the U.S. Military Post Commission, February 10, 1896. Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.
[90] Letter from the West Street and North End Electric Railway Company to the army Post Committee, February 14, 1896. FLHC, Box 1, Folder 7, SMA.
[91] Seattle Street and Avenue Guide: Fort Lawton. *Seattle City Directory* (R.L. Polk and Company, 1911), 27.
[92] General Orders Number 83, War Department, May 18, 1908. FLHC, Box 1, Folder 10, SMA.
[93] Advertisement, "Don't You Do It!" *Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* June 2, 1907, 21.
[94] Letter from Colonel William Evans to the Adjutant, Department of the Columbia, September 12, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1700024, NARA.

DON'T YOU DO IT!

It isn't fair to yourself to stay at home today when you can ENJOY A BEAUTIFUL, INSTRUCTIVE and PROFITABLE drive as the guest of this office to

Beautiful Magnolia Park

THE Sea Shore Point, the North Headland of Seattle's Harbor, the Choicest Residence Property on Magnolia Bluff. We say it! We believe it! Nature has made it! We will give you Water, Grade, Sidewalks.

If you own an auto drive out over the new Magnolia Drive. It's your last chance to see this point as nature has beautified it. ANOTHER YEAR will see MANY HOMES, graded streets and other improvements.

Such people as Attorney A. Dresbach, G. Quinlan, A. B. Newell, Mrs. Hubbell, E. Bayliss, R. Ramaker, and many others have bought on this point and will build HANDSOME HOMES.

HOW TO GO

Take Fort Lawton car on First Avenue to Twentieth Avenue West, Interbay. Our auto meets car from 2 p. m. to 5:30 p. m. "Seeing Magnolia Bluff Stages" run from 9:30 a. m. to 6 p. m. LATER BY REQUEST.

THE POINT

DON'T Miss Going Today. You will find Magnolia Park and the other properties on Magnolia Bluff controlled by this office farther advanced with development work than any other properties now on the market.

MAGNOLIA PARK is unique in location, plat, view, and in natural beauty—all the essentials that make the home real.

MAGNOLIA PARK is a garden of magnolia and dogwood trees, a paradise for view—real, live, active, but restful view. Don't take our word for it. BUT SEE IT! It's a part of SEATTLE—we are proud of it. GO ONCE, and you will go again with your friends. You will buy! You will build! You will thank this office for keeping at you to go.

Streets 80 ft. wide. Lots 50-ft. front. $3,000 building restrictions. Terms, 1-4 cash, balance 6 per cent. View unsurpassed

REMEMBER, this is your last chance to see Magnolia Park and the Scenic Drive as it exists today; improvements, street grade, car line and beautiful homes will follow rapidly. Remember Capitol Hill, Denny-Blaine, and other choice property that are now. SEE MAGNOLIA PARK TODAY.

Gentleman with each car to explain and point out items of interest

DAVID P. EASTMAN

209 Colman Bldg.

Figure 6 David Eastman's advertisement for real estate near Fort Lawton, 1907. Source: Seattle Post-Intelligencer, June 2, 1907, 21.

Another of the leaders was real estate agent William Mackay. When Amanda Redding was assaulted on June 4, she ran to her neighbor Mackay's house for help. Whether out of genuine concern for his neighbor or because he sensed an opportunity to boost his flagging business prospects, Mackay became a fervent devotee to the cause of ridding Interbay of its Black residents.[95] Shortly after the assault on Redding, a vigilance committee of Interbay residents began telling their African American neighbors to leave the area.[96] On the evening of June 7th, the wife of a Black soldier, Balthina Grant, was assaulted in her house when a group of men, led by William Mackay, broke in and told her to leave. She fled her home and went to Fort

[95] The available information on William Mackay's real estate career indicates a lack of success. He speculated heavily in lots outside Fort Lawton. He lost dozens of them to condemnation proceedings in 1909 when a canal was dug to link Salmon Bay to Lake Union. According to the *Seattle City Directory*, he had abandoned the profession entirely by 1920 and become a manager at a rubber manufacturing company. "Hill Road Starts Condemnations," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 13, 1909, 9; *Seattle City Directory* (R.L. Polk and Company, 1920), 1225.
[96] "Bledser Eager to Get Inside Penitentiary."

Lawton for protection from the mob. She later filed charges against the men who had entered her home.[97] Mackay wrote a letter of complaint about his arrest to Representative Humphrey and accused base commander Lt. Col. Miller of ignoring the concerns of the Interbay residents.[98] The congressman took the complaint to the War Department, and an investigation into the commanding officer was included in the inquiry about the Bledser affair.[99]

An army officer at Fort Lawton described Mackay in a sworn statement as "a real estate dealer interested in developing properties in the vicinity of the post."[100] Another described how Mackay and his fellow "real estate men" were not only concerned about expelling the hundreds of Black soldiers at Fort Lawton but also the African American family members and business owners in Interbay. While white officers enjoyed on-post family quarters, the families of Black soldiers had to find lodgings off Fort Lawton, and many settled in the Interbay neighborhood.[101] Mackay and the other Interbay Committee leaders intimidated Black-owned businesses and others that served Black customers. Ferryman Gus Carlson, who stored a boat that belonged to Black soldiers and had rowed Nathaniel Bledser and his friends across Salmon Bay on the day of the assault, was told by Mackay and a police officer that he was no longer allowed to do business with African American soldiers.[102]

Colonel William Evans, who had taken command of Fort Lawton in the summer of 1910 from Lt. Col. Miller, wrote two memorandums to the Department of the Columbia refuting the

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[97] "Negro Soldier's Wife Accuses White Citizens," *Seattle Daily Times,* June 29, 1910, 10.
[98] Letter from William Mackay to Representative Will E. Humphrey, August 18, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1664218, NARA.
[99] Inspector General's Memorandum, September 15, 1910.
[100] Interrogation of Captain Samuel P. Lyon, 25th Infantry, September 28, 1911. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662207, NARA.
[101] Interrogation of Captain William G. Doane, 25th Infantry, September 28, 1911. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1662207, NARA.
[102] Statement of G.F. Carlson, October 10, 1910. RG 393, Box 23, Folder 6763, NARA.

allegations of widespread misconduct. Additionally, he defended the actions and character of Lt. Col. Miller, whom he had known and served with for thirty years.[103] He wrote, "The conclusion is stronger than ever in my mind that the real cause of the complaint is the presence of Colored troops in this station and not their conduct."[104] Further, he more explicitly tied the controversy to real estate interests, stating:

> It seems to me that the residents of Interbay, especially those who are engaged in real estate operations, can be placated only by the removal of the colored troops from this station. The complaints referred to herein, and others to which they have referred in a general way, seem to indicate that the effort of the complainants is directed rather to getting the troops away than to righting any wrongs that may have been committed. Unreasonable complaints are trumped up and insignificant events exaggerated willfully in order to make out a case.[105]

In the opinion of Colonel Evans and other army officials at Fort Lawton, there was a cynical motive for the efforts to remove Black soldiers from Seattle. Real estate agents who were financially invested in the property values of the Interbay neighborhood used the Bledser incident to push residents of color out.

A Seattle judge dismissed the criminal complaint against William Mackay and two other defendants on September 1st.[106] Undeterred, Mackay continued his crusade against the Twenty-Fifth. He and David Eastman wrote now-Senator Miles Poindexter in April 1912, protesting that the regiment would remain in Seattle for an additional eighteen months.[107] While they were

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[103] Letter from Colonel William Evans to the Adjutant, Department of the Columbia, September 12, 1910.
[104] Letter from Colonel William Evans to the Adjutant, Department of the Columbia, September 17, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1700024, NARA.
[105] Letter from Colonel William Evans to the Adjutant, Department of the Columbia, September 12, 1910.
[106] *State of Washington v. William Mackay et al*, File Number 5138 (Sup. Court of the State of WA for King County, 1910). Copy in RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1664218, NARA.
[107] Telegram from William Mackay and David Eastman to Senator Miles Poindexter, April 9, 1912. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1900134, NARA.

unsuccessful in curtailing the Twenty-Fifth's tour of duty in Seattle, restrictive covenants and other discriminatory policies concentrated the city's Black community in the Central district, far from the gates of Fort Lawton.[108] By 1920, fewer than twenty-five African Americans lived in the Interbay neighborhood.[109]

Conclusion

President Taft's decision to resist public pressure to remove the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment from Seattle in the wake of the assault on Amanda Redding provided due process and the presumption of innocence for Black troops that had been denied to them in Brownsville. By insisting on a thorough investigation, Taft provided space and time for the War Department to discover that a group of real estate agents sensationalized the Bledser Affair to increase property values. The President temporarily ended a chain of incidents in which cities successfully demanded the removal of Black regiments when conflict, often instigated by white residents, broke out. It was a fleeting moment, but it belies the assumption that institutional racism was inevitable in this period of American history. The Wilson Administration would revert to the previous practice of swift condemnation and exclusion. Taft's stand for the rights of African American soldiers would be a short-term advance in the long struggle for equality.

The Bledser Affair was a stark notice to Seattle's business and political elite that their influence and control ended at the fort's gates. Seattle's leading citizens held tightly to the view

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[108] Quintard Taylor's research on the formation of Seattle's Central District includes the time period of the Bledser Affair, although he does not address it in his work. It is probable he considered the soldiers outside the scope of his study. Since the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment was posted to Fort Lawton from 1909-1913, they could be rightly considered a transient population. Still, Taylor's central premise that Seattle's white population was "deeply ambivalent about its commitment to racial equality" is reflected in the Bledser Affair. Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District, from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era,* 10, 92-94.
[109] Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District, from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era,* 83.

that since they had donated Magnolia Bluff to the government to establish Fort Lawton, they had a say in how the army used the facility. They believed the army had no right to station Black soldiers at the base without their approval. When they withdrew their consent in the wake of the assault on Redding, they relied on their senators and members of Congress in Washington to effect the removal of the regiment from the city. The War Department, backed by President Taft, made it clear that it would station its troops wherever it wanted and was not beholden to the city elite's sentiments. The boundaries of Fort Lawton were, in effect, the city limits of Seattle on Magnolia Bluff.

The early twentieth century was a period of significant change in American civil-military relations. The burden of empire overseas and the threat of labor unrest at home brought soldiers in contact with cities more often. Civic leaders wanted the security and revenue that army forts and naval bases brought. Military officials, recognizing that industrial warfare now relied on railway and communications networks, sought to jettison remote outposts in favor of larger bases in or near urban areas. Still, the presence of African Americans in uniform complicated the cooperation between cities and the military. Taft and his administration’s actions surrounding the Bledser Affair were an outlier from the multitude of injustices committed against African Americans in the Progressive Era. For Seattle and the army, the incident was another point of divergence in a relationship that both hoped would be beneficial but was, in practice, dysfunctional.

CHAPTER THREE

PLEASURE DRIVES AND RIFLE FIRE: JOHN C. OLMSTED'S 1910 PLAN FOR SEATTLE'S FORT LAWTON

> "It is clearly understood by the city that Fort Lawton is not to be insidiously turned into what would be practically a public park at the expense of the United States government."[1]
>
> *John C. Olmsted, 1910*

In 1978, a few years after Discovery Park opened on the site of the former army post Fort Lawton, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* writer Carol Perkins described the unique space close to downtown Seattle. She urged her readers to escape the "grating, nerve jangling stresses of city living" by spending time in the park where the blue waters of the Puget Sound and the majestic, white-capped Olympic Mountains frame expansive meadowlands. The park features a three-mile loop trail, 250-foot bluffs over the shore, and over 155 species of birds.[2] While Discovery Park has been the crown jewel of Seattle's green spaces since 1973, there had been an effort much earlier to include the grounds of Fort Lawton in the city's comprehensive park system. In 1910, the renowned Olmsted Brothers Architectural Firm came to Seattle to connect the army post with the park system. This chapter asks: Why did the War Department reject Seattle's 1910 effort to include Fort Lawton in the Olmsted park system?

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[1] John C. Olmsted, "Special Report on the Improvement of Fort Lawton Military Reservation, Seattle, Washington," July 5, 1910. Fort Lawton History Collection (FHLC), Box 2, Folder 12, Seattle Municipal Archives (SMA).
[2] Carol Perkins, "Discover Discovery Park," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 7, 1978, C-1.

When Fort Lawton became Discovery Park in 1973, Parks Department employee Don Sherwood thoroughly documented the post's history.[3] After the National Park Service took ownership of several buildings on the reservation in 1978, they drafted a comprehensive history of the army post that summarized the Olmsted plan to connect Fort Lawton to the park system. Sherwood and the park service wrote that the War Department had never justified their rejection of Olmsted's proposal to use Fort Lawton as both a military facility and an extension of Seattle's public spaces. The National Park Service publication stated, "The Olmsted report was forwarded by officers at Fort Lawton to the Secretary of War and never heard of again."[4] The War Department had, in fact, studied the Olmsted proposal at length and concluded that Fort Lawton could not be used for military purposes while part of the city's park network.[5] This chapter argues that the War Department rejected John C. Olmsted's proposal to link Fort Lawton with his system of parks and boulevards in Seattle because they considered the post an exclusionary space unsuitable for public use and solely dedicated to military utility, a rare instance in Progressive Era urban development when city boosters were stymied in their ambitions.

Public parks became a popular feature of American cities in the decades after the 1858 completion of New York's Central Park by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Parks represented a new conception of urban space dedicated to public use. Every available lot in Manhattan was potentially lucrative, and real estate interests and their allies in city government contested the setting aside of hundreds of acres of land for a park.[6] For the city, a park

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[3] The Seattle Municipal Archives maintains the Don Sherwood Parks History Collection in its records.
[4] U.S. National Park Service, Pacific Northwest Region, "Fort Lawton: A Record," (Pacific Northwest National Parks and Forests Association, 1983), 20-21.
[5] Record of the Board of Officers Considering the Olmsted Plan for Fort Lawton, January 11, 1911. Records of U.S. army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, Box 20, Folder 5656, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).
[6] See Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Cornell University Press, 1992), and Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850 (*Cornell University Press, 1989).

represented a loss of potential tax revenue in a system in which property owners paid for infrastructure through annual assessments.[7] By 1900, however, business and real estate interests favored parks and playgrounds for their positive effects on nearby property values.[8] Major cities across the United States hired landscape architects to design green spaces amongst rapidly expanding urban sprawl. Historians William H. Wilson and Matthew Klingle describe how John C. Olmsted sought to combine Seattle's natural beauty with a comprehensive network of parks and boulevards. Seattle later embraced the City Beautiful Movement popularized by Daniel Burnham's White City and the writings of Charles Mulford Robinson. An ambitious and expensive plan to completely reshape Seattle to resemble Vienna and Paris, proposed by urban planner Virgil Bogue in 1912, was defeated by voters who did not want to pay for the bonds necessary to fund such a venture.[9] In addition to urban aesthetics, scholars have highlighted how parks provided city dwellers relief from the overcrowded, disease-ridden conditions many resided in. Air quality, sanitation, and environmental impacts on well-being were real concerns that growing cities needed to contend with.[10]

By the end of the nineteenth century, private property owners had staked out much of the major population centers in the eastern United States, while the West was primarily owned by the federal government. Like other western states, Washington was federal land that had been ceded or sold to private settlers or businesses. To encourage additional settlement in the West, the

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[7] See Robin L. Einhorn, *Property Rules* (The University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Terrence J. McDonald, *The Parameters of Urban Fiscal Policy: Socioeconomic Change and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1860-1906* (University of California Press, 1986).
[8] Ocean Howell, "Play Pays: Urban Land Politics and Playgrounds in the United States, 1900-1930," *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 6 (September 2008): 961-994.
[9] William H Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement (*Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) and Matthew Klingle, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (Yale University Press, 2007).
[10] See Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) and Guenter B. Risse, *Plague, Fear, and Politics in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

federal government assisted new arrivals with water projects, resource management, and military bases to provide security in populated areas and along major transit routes.[11] The federal government's presence in the West advanced urban and economic development, and planners could expect federal assistance in growing their cities.

The United States Army in 1910 was undergoing significant change. After decades of wars against Indigenous peoples in the West, the army struggled to adapt to America's emergence on the world stage during the Spanish-American War, along with rapid technological advancements and increased militarism among potential European rivals.[12] Sustained efforts at reforming the structure and mission of the army, started in earnest in the 1880s, would continue in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Reformers inspired by the writings of Emory Upton urged the army to divest itself from urban constabulary and coastal defense duties and dedicate itself to better organization and training to prepare for future large-scale wars. In 1903, Secretary of War Elihu Root pushed through many of Upton's reforms, including streamlining the headquarters from semi-autonomous bureaus beholden to Congressional pressure to a centralized hierarchy that reported through the uniformed Chief of Staff of the Army to the civilian Secretary.[13] When Olmsted made his proposal to the War Department in 1910, the army

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[11] See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (Norton, 1988) and Carl Abbott, "The Federal Presence," in *The Oxford History of the American West,* ed. Clyde A. Milner, Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss (Oxford University Press, 1996), 469-499.

[12] See Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Macmillan, 1973) and Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891 (*Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1973).

[13] See Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), Perry D. Jamieson, *Crossing the Deadly Ground: United States Army Tactics, 1865-1899* (University of Alabama Press, 1994), Jerry M. Cooper, "The army's Search for a Mission, 1865-1890," in *Against All Enemies: Interpretations of American Military History from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Kenneth J. Hagan and William R. Roberts (Greenwood Press, 1986), 173-195, and Peter Karsten,

was significantly different than the organization that collaborated with the city of Seattle in 1896 to establish Fort Lawton.

The Seattle Park Commission misjudged the military's view of its posts. They assumed that Fort Lawton, like the ship canal the Army Corps of Engineers was digging to link Seattle's lakes with the Puget Sound, would have complementary public and private uses that would benefit continued urban development.[14] The military, on the other hand, viewed the army post as a platform to project federal power outward, rather than absorbing the priorities of the local government.[15] By denying public uses for the post, the military enforced a limit on how much federal land would be turned over to local interests. The United States Army viewed Fort Lawton in zero-sum terms: the more it served the civic needs of the city, the less useful it became as a military facility.

Drifting Townward

The American parks movement, as envisioned by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1870, was pursued in Seattle starting in 1903. A system designed by John C. Olmsted, on behalf of the Olmsted Brothers Architectural Firm hired by the Seattle Parks Commission, laid out an expansive system of parks and boulevards to preserve green spaces in the expanding metropolis. Their plan aligned with a vision first encapsulated by a speech the elder Olmsted gave in 1870. Speaking to the American Social Science Association in Boston, Frederick Law Olmsted provided his view of the future of American cities. Having been the driving force behind the

"Armed Progressives: The Military Reorganizes for the American Century," in *Building the Organizational Society*, ed. Jerry Israel (The Free Press, 1972), 197-232.

[14] Klingle, *Emerald City*, 71

[15] Jamieson, *Crossing the Deadly Ground*, 22-35.

construction of Central Park in New York, Olmsted helped popularize the concept of city planning on a large scale to the American public.

Olmsted articulated the contradictions of American cities: they were bastions of commerce and prosperity, yet deeply unhealthy for their residents. He described the urbanization of the United States as a "strong drift townward," noting the prominent urban/rural divide among the populace.[16] Cities served as catalysts for fostering new technologies, enhancing civil liberties, and accelerating human progress. He envisioned the country's future as one characterized by cities connected through expanding railroad and telegraph networks. Economically, cities represented an inevitable concentration of commercial activity, where reducing the distance between people and markets would stimulate growth.[17] Olmsted believed in a bright future driven by the creative and democratizing energy of cities.

The issue with cities in the nineteenth century was that they were dangerous and unhealthy places. Olmsted believed that crowded conditions encouraged a suspicious and hostile attitude among city dwellers towards one another.[18] Further, he believed that the air in populated, industrial cities was toxic for their inhabitants. Beyond its physical effects, he believed that poor air quality eroded a person's moral character, contributing to crime due to inadequate city planning.[19] To address the fundamental flaws of cities, Olmsted proposed that every major urban area should be planned to separate a dense commercial area from residential areas that featured more space and parks. He argued that trees, green spaces, and sunlight could cleanse a city's air,

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[16] Frederick Law Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns* (Riverside Press, 1870), 4.
[17] Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, 4-9.
[18] Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, 11-12.
[19] Scientists would later validate Olmsted's views on the effect of pollution on physical health and social cohesion. See Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (Harvard University Press, 1998) and Adrienne Denoyelles, *The Lung Block: Tuberculosis and Contested Spaces in Early Twentieth-Century New York* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2024).

resulting in better health. Furthermore, he believed that open spaces for recreation would serve as release valves for the societal pressures that come with the concentration of diverse people and experiences.[20] Olmsted asserted that a park could be a powerful tool to "weaken the dangerous inclinations which man derives from his nature."[21] Parks were vital components of a modern city, safeguarding its residents' physical and moral health.

Frederick Law Olmsted was concerned with parks. Civic leaders had to be concerned with politics. Central Park occupied 600 acres of Manhattan land that could have been used for housing or business. For civic leaders, the park's establishment was an inescapably political decision.[22] Six hundred acres for a park meant 600 acres less available for housing or businesses. Only an empowered municipal administration could make and enforce those decisions. Scarred by his experience with New York political bosses, Olmsted insisted that park boards must be granted significant latitude and authority, insulated from popular sentiment or electoral pressures. Otherwise, the cynical designs of short-sighted individuals would undermine the professional application of utilitarian principles for the health of a city's residents.[23] Municipal governments needed to be strong enough to impose order on space. Olmsted passed his passion for parks and landscape architecture to his son and stepson, Frederick Jr. and John. The Olmsted Brothers Architectural Firm became highly sought after by cities across the United States, designing thousands of parks and public spaces. They shared their father's conviction that parks were a curative for the detrimental effects of the modern city.

[20] Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, 10-20.
[21] Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, 34.
[22] Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, 27.
[23] Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, 25-33.

The Seattle Park Commission hired the Olmsteds in the midst of the city's rapid expansion, which had been a mid-sized logging town just a decade prior. Seattle's physical topography presented a challenge to urban and park planners. The city, located on a wooded, hilly strip of land, was unsuitable for grand public works and wide boulevards. When city engineer R.H. Thomson arrived in 1881, he asked, "How will the people in one end of the city be able to do business with those in the other end, with such hills and deep valleys between them?"[24] Thomson aimed to address Seattle's topographical challenges through an ambitious program to regrade downtown streets by flattening the hilly terrain. The largest hurdle was Denny Hill, which rose 232 feet above sea level and complicated travel along Seattle's Second and Third Avenues.[25] Thomson and his workers used hydraulic water cannons to wash away the hill, sluicing soil down prepared channels to Elliott Bay, where it was either dumped along the shore or deposited by barges in the heart of Seattle's deep harbor. In twenty years, as much as fifty million cubic yards of Seattle's downtown were removed, enabling the city to expand at its edges.[26]

[24] Reginald Heber Thomson, *That Man Thomson* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1950), 13.
[25] David B. Williams, *Too High and Too Steep: Reshaping Seattle's Topography* (University of Washington Press, 2015), 146-150.
[26] Klingle, *Emerald City,* 86-104.

Figure 7 The Denny Hill Regrade, 1910. Source: Asahel Curtis, University of Washington Special Collections, UW 4812.

In addition to reshaping downtown, the city sought to construct a framework of parks and boulevards to support its ambitious goals. Seattle's urban regime intended to elevate its community's profile to match that of older, more established eastern cities. They sought to demonstrate to the eastern elite that their city was organized, beautiful, and refined.[27] In 1903,

[27] Seattle Board of Park Commissioners, *Parks Playgrounds and Boulevards of Seattle, Washington* (Pacific Press, 1909), 9.

the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners hired the Olmsted Brothers to design a series of parks and boulevards for their growing city. John Olmsted spent the summer developing a plan, which he presented to the Board in October.[28] Olmsted proposed an extensive redesign of Seattle. The bodies of water east and west of Seattle defined the city's hourglass shape. The Puget Sound bordered the city on the west, while Lake Washington restricted the eastward expansion of downtown. Lake Union and Salmon Bay separated downtown Seattle from its northern neighborhoods. Olmsted envisioned a network of parks and playgrounds throughout the city, connected by tree-lined boulevards designed for leisurely strolls or drives. The boulevards would closely follow the shoreline, often framed by mountain ranges.[29]

One of Olmsted's proposals was a parkway north of Elliott Bay that would connect several new parks, forming a twenty-three-mile scenic drive for residents. Some of the most breathtaking views along the proposed parkway were found at Magnolia Bluff, which the city had donated to the War Department to establish Fort Lawton in 1898.[30] Olmsted believed that the army post would not hinder their plans, asserting, "It can be safely assumed that Fort Lawton Reservation will have various pleasure drives laid out in it, and that its uses by the public as a pleasure ground will always be permitted by the United States authorities."[31] Starting in 1903, Olmsted and the Seattle Park Commissioners planned on Fort Lawton being seamlessly incorporated into their park system.

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[28] *First Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners, Seattle, Wash., 1884-1904* (Lowman and Hanford Stationary and Printing Co., 1905), 1-2.
[29] Olmsted Associates. "Seattle's Park and Boulevard System, 1908," Olmsted Associates Records: Job File 2690, Frink Park/ Seattle Park System, Seattle, Washington, 1901 to 1911 (OAR), Library of Congress (LC).
[30] Letter from Seattle Chamber of Commerce to the U.S. army Post Commission, February 11, 1896. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 9, SMA.
[31] *First Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners,* 46.

In addition to his report, Olmsted recommended several administrative changes to facilitate the implementation of the plan. Echoing his stepfather's advice from 1870, he urged the Board of Park Commissioners to be granted sufficient authority to execute their plans with minimal political interference.[32] Proposed amendments to the city charter would allow park commissioners to be elected for five-year terms, thereby giving political cover to his efforts like his father had counseled. The Park Commissioners placed the amendments on the ballot in March 1904 and faced opposition from the City Council and the Superintendent of Parks. The city engineer, R. H. Thomson, penned a letter to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* outlining his opposition to the amendment, which he called "repugnant to a democratic form of government."[33] Thomson objected to the empowerment of a Board of Park Commissioners that would be independent of the City Council and the existing public works department. He warned the new structure would be unaccountable to voters and susceptible to corrupt actors. His real objection to the ballot measure was unrelated to the principles of democratic government. Thomson had spent the last twenty years carving out his sphere of influence within the city's urban regime, and an empowered Board of Park Commissioners would threaten his dominance over public works. Despite this opposition, Seattle voters narrowly passed the amendment: 3824 votes in favor and 3722 opposed, clearing the way for Olmsted's vision.[34]

By 1909, Olmsted and the Board had accomplished a large part of their plan. Funded by $1.5 million in bonds, the city had completed fourteen parks and five playgrounds, totaling 1,100 acres of city space. While Seattle had successfully established recreational spaces throughout the

[32] Letter from the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners to the Olmsted Brothers, February 10, 1904. OAR, LC.
[33] Does Not Favor Park Amendment," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 6, 1904.
[34] Letters from the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners to the Olmsted Brothers, March 7 and 11, 1904. OAR, LC; "Does Not Favor Park Amendment"; "Park Amendment Wins," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 9, 1904.

city, the planned boulevard to link them together was yet to be built. The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition of 1909, held on newly constructed grounds in the northeast quadrant of the city, had diverted funds and attention from the greenway. Recognizing their lack of funds, the Board of Park Commissioners estimated that the Olmsted Plan could not be fully implemented with additional bonds until 1919 at the earliest.[35]

[35] Seattle Board of Park Commissioners, *Parks Playgrounds and Boulevards of Seattle, Washington*, 1-12.

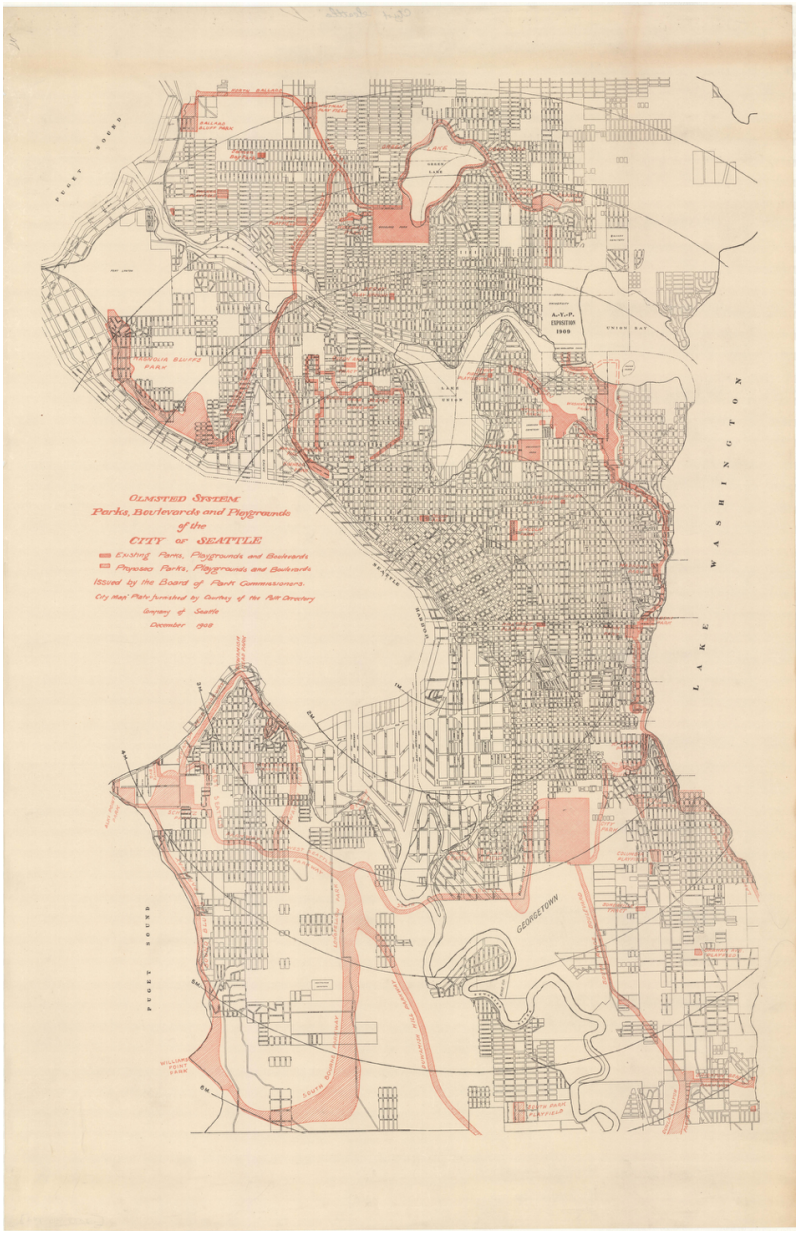

Figure 8 Seattle's Park and Boulevard System, 1908. Source: Olmsted Associates. Olmsted Associates Records: Job File 2690, Library of Congress

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Seattle's transformation to a world-class city was well underway. R.H. Thomson's engineers had reshaped a prominent geographical feature of downtown and expanded the area to grow the commercial center. John Olmsted's park plan had resulted in over a dozen public spaces, but its funding had been depleted. Fort Lawton's 641 acres remained untouched by the changes, but Olmsted envisioned an eventual linkage of the

army post with his network of parks and boulevards. Thomson's plan for public works would provide park planners with an opening to approach the War Department about using their fort for public benefit.

Money and Military Advantages

Fort Lawton was untouched by Seattle city planning until 1908, when City Engineer R. H. Thomson successfully lobbied Congress to authorize a sewer line through the reservation. The army assigned post engineer Major Hiram Chittenden to work with Thomson to facilitate the construction. In the course of his duties, Chittenden began to doubt the long-term military utility of Fort Lawton and drafted a proposal heavily influenced by Thomson's terraforming methods to address the post's shortcomings. In turn, Chittenden's proposal inspired John Olmsted to attempt to complete his system of parks and boulevards by enlisting the army to extend them through Fort Lawton.

Like many growing cities, Seattle faced a new challenge: moving fresh water in and wastewater out. Thomson, who had sluiced Denny Hill into the bay, was involved in two other significant projects. First, he designed and built a system to supply Seattle with fresh water from the Cedar River, located south of the city. The second project aimed to remove the city's waste. For this, Thomson planned two main sewer pipes to carry away wastewater. The south sewer line was designed to empty into the Puget Sound below city limits. For the northern outlet, he discovered a beach near Shilshole Bay with currents that, by his assessment, would carry waste

offshore into the deep waters of the Puget Sound. This beach was part of the Fort Lawton military reservation on its underdeveloped western half.[36]

A significant portion of Fort Lawton was not being used by the military. The army built the post between 1898 and 1900 to serve as a crucial link in the coastal defense of the Puget Sound, featuring artillery and mortar batteries to protect against attacking ships.[37] While limited funds prevented the immediate installation of seacoast defensive fortifications, the army intended to construct them at a later date.[38] By the summer of 1902, a board of army generals had designated Fort Lawton as a garrison for four infantry companies, totaling around three hundred soldiers. As new buildings for infantry were built, the Secretary of War approved plans to reserve the western half of Fort Lawton, closest to Puget Sound, for fortifications. Consequently, approximately three hundred acres of land on the west side of Magnolia Bluff remained undeveloped.[39]

Coastal defense was a top priority for the army when Fort Lawton was built. In 1895, the army envisioned a layered defense to protect the sound, with the first line of defense positioned north of Seattle at its entrance. The second line would be located at Fort Lawton, where batteries of coastal guns could deliver plunging fire upon attacking warships.[40] The outbreak of the Spanish-American War and subsequent overseas occupation duty resulted in fewer funds for coastal defense from Congress. In 1907, the Commanding General of the Department of the

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[36] Thomson, *That Man Thomson*, 39-44.
[37] Board of Engineers, U.S. army, "Artillery Defense of Puget Sound–Views on Proposed Projects," June 27, 1895. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 6, SMA.
[38] Fourth Endorsement, Memorandum from Major John Mills to the Chief of Engineers, June 17, 1902. FLHC, Box 1, Folder 10, SMA.
[39] Fifth Endorsement, Memorandum from Major John Mills to the Chief of Engineers, June 18, 1902. FLHC, Box 1, Folder 10, SMA.
[40] Board of Engineers, U.S. army, "Artillery Defense of Puget Sound–Views on Proposed Projects," June 27, 1895. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 6, SMA.

Columbia, responsible for army forts and operations in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, wrote a scathing report to the War Department regarding the state of coastal defenses in the Puget Sound. The outer line of defenses—Forts Worden, Casey, and Flagler—was severely under-resourced. There were not enough guns to deter an enemy fleet, and one potential avenue of attack was entirely undefended. Surveillance equipment, including telescopes and searchlights, was inadequate. The army estimated that 100 officers and 2,459 soldiers were necessary to adequately staff the forts and artillery, yet only twenty officers and 567 soldiers were available.[41] When Congress allocated an additional $300,000 for coastal defenses in 1908, Puget Sound defense planners chose to address shortages at Forts Worden, Casey, and Flagler rather than establishing new fortifications at Fort Lawton.[42] The reasoning for leaving the western half of Fort Lawton undeveloped to maintain it for coastal defense fortifications was no longer valid. More broadly, the army was shifting its focus away from coastal defense and urban unrest as primary missions. War Department planners began prioritizing large maneuver areas for practicing warfighting skills and identifying potential depots for supplies and troops in the event of a major war. While Fort Lawton would no longer be used as a coastal defense site, army officials considered its location on the Pacific seaboard and near major rail lines as a vital asset in case of war.[43]

The city moved ahead in urban development and looked towards Fort Lawton to extend public utilities. In 1905, Thomson and the Seattle municipal government sought permission from

[41] Memorandum from the Commanding General, Department of the Columbia, to the Adjutant General, November 12, 1907. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 6, SMA.
[42] Memorandum from the army Chief of Engineers to the Adjutant General, July 21, 1908. FHLC, Box 2, Folder 1, SMA.
[43] Memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of War from the Chief of Staff Regarding the Chittenden Report, October 22, 1908. Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, Record Group 94 (RG 94), Box 4346, Folder 1231225, NARA

the army to lay a sewer pipe through Fort Lawton. They faced rejection for the next several years until Thomson enlisted the city's congressional delegation to advocate on their behalf with the War Department. In 1908, Washington Senator Samuel Piles introduced a bill granting the city the right-of-way for the sewer line. The Department of the Columbia, which oversaw Fort Lawton and other army posts in the Pacific Northwest, submitted a report opposing the legislation and sent it to Washington.[44] Military authorities regarded the proposed sewer tunnel as a significant threat to the viability of Fort Lawton. The Chief Surgeon of the Department of the Columbia concluded that "the sewage issuing from the proposed tunnel will cause an unsanitary condition of affairs; that offensive odors will be generated from the decomposition of the deposits cast upon the shore, and will finally lead to the abandonment of the post for sanitary reasons."[45] The report also questioned Thomson's claim that the sea current would carry the effluent away from the shore. Military officials met with Thomson and concluded that he prioritized the sanitary health of his city over the continued utility of Fort Lawton for the War Department.[46]

Secretary of War William Howard Taft directed that the army's chief engineer in Seattle, Major Hiram Chittenden, investigate the matter and make a recommendation.[47] Chittenden met with Thomson and listened to his reasoning that the sewer pipe would not harm Fort Lawton's soldiers.[48] After conducting his own survey of the proposed site, Chittenden added language to

[44] Summary of War Department Records Regarding the Proposed Sewer Line through Fort Lawton, February 12, 1908. RG 94, Box 4346, Folder 1339642, NARA.
[45] Summary of War Department Records Regarding the Proposed Sewer Line through Fort Lawton, February 12, 1908.
[46] Summary of War Department Records Regarding the Proposed Sewer Line through Fort Lawton, February 12, 1908.
[47] Memorandum from the Secretary of War to the Chief of Engineers Regarding Senate Bill 5126, March 26, 1908. RG 94, Box 4346, Folder 1231225, NARA.
[48] Thomson, *That Man Thomson*, 46-47.

the proposed legislation that allowed the War Department to stop sewage discharge through the pipe if it became detrimental to the post but otherwise endorsed Thomson's plan.[49] Congress passed the modified bill, and the city got its sewer system.[50]

During his investigation of the sewer pipe issue, Chittenden became interested in the viability of Fort Lawton as a military post, as some questioned whether the fort should exist at all. Chittenden was unclear whether Fort Lawton's doubters were from the Seattle city government, the army, or both. On his own initiative, the engineer drafted a plan to ensure Fort Lawton's future viability. His plan reflected the work and methods of R. H. Thomson's ongoing campaign to alter the geography of Seattle through public works. Chittenden firmly believed that an army post was necessary on the Puget Sound to accommodate a large body of troops and supplies that could support military operations in the Philippines, Alaska, or Hawaii. He thought Fort Lawton's distance from downtown Seattle and its position atop Magnolia Bluff made it ideal for a military post. In addition to the 641 acres of the fort, the U.S. government controlled the tidelands bordering the post. Chittenden envisioned employing Thomson's terraforming techniques to expand the usable area of the post and address one of its main deficiencies: the shooting range that bisected the fort and directed rifle fire towards the underused western half of the reservation.

For infantry troops like those stationed at Fort Lawton, the rifle was their primary weapon. Target practice and group firing drills were essential for their proficiency as soldiers. The existing rifle range at Fort Lawton, located north of the main group of buildings, was a narrow clearing running east to west for a total of 300 yards. Army regulations required a range

[49] Senate Report 537, 60th Congress, 1st Session (Government Printing Office, 1908), 2-3.
[50] War Department, General Orders, No. 83, May 18, 1908.

of at least 1000 yards, ideally on a north-south axis, to allow practice at all times of the day without direct sunlight in the soldiers' eyes. The current range was insufficient to train soldiers to shoot their rifles accurately at distances of up to 1000 yards and was too small to accommodate group firing drills, as only a few soldiers could fire simultaneously.[51]

Chittenden proposed establishing a new rifle range southwest of Magnolia Bluff along the tidelands. To construct the new range, the army would need to employ hydraulic water cannons, similar to those used in Seattle's Denny Hill regrade, to wash down the southwestern section of Magnolia Bluff and utilize it to fill in the tidelands. Furthermore, the army would have to clear the timber from most of Fort Lawton to create a bulkhead of logs 1,000 yards off the shore. Once the tidelands were filled and the bulkhead established, Chittenden envisioned a new range with the required distance and compass orientation. It would also be spacious enough for multiple formations of soldiers to practice firing simultaneously.[52] If implemented as Chittenden suggested, it would significantly enhance the viability of Fort Lawton as an infantry post.

Chittenden also proposed flattening the rolling terrain of the post and opening more of it for additional buildings and drill fields. The earth removed from the bluff could then be used on the north side of the fort to fill in tidelands and build new wharves and warehouses that would support his vision of Fort Lawton as a logistics hub. Discussing his push for a plan of future development, Chittenden wrote, "It often happens that military posts, like cities, are developed only as necessity arises, without any prearranged plan having been laid down."[53] Chittenden

[51] Major Hiram Chittenden Report on Fort Lawton, May 20, 1908. FLHC, Box 2, Folder 11, SMA; War Department, *Firing Regulations for Small Arms for the United States Army and the Organized Militia* (Government Printing Office, 1904), 138-142.
[52] Major Hiram Chittenden Report on Fort Lawton, May 20, 1908.
[53] Major Hiram Chittenden Report on Fort Lawton, May 20, 1908.

recognized that Fort Lawton's purpose had changed and believed his proposal was the best path forward to utilize the post effectively.

The army reviewed his report, which included recommendations for a substantial investment of time, money, and effort to convert it into a more suitable infantry post capable of supporting operations in the Pacific. They agreed only with some of Chittenden's recommendations, stating:

> While the reservation of Fort Lawton is particularly well adapted for a large magazine and depot of supplies, it is not in its present condition suitable for a large garrison. Nor can it be made so without the expenditure of money out of all proportion to the military advantages that would be obtained.[54]

The report took a middle ground: Fort Lawton was too essential as a supply depot to abandon, yet not significant enough to warrant the investment of necessary resources to make it a more viable post. Furthermore, the army report indicated an intention to shift its focus to a new, much larger military post located fifty miles south near Tacoma at American Lake, which would later become Fort Lewis. The army's response is clear: the only purpose it saw in Fort Lawton was to store and transport materials to other locations.[55] With most of the existing reservation undeveloped and the army uninterested in allocating the necessary funds, the report conveyed the impression that much of Fort Lawton would remain unused.

Seattle's city planning was on a collision course with Fort Lawton. After three years of effort, R. H. Thomson successfully pushed for a sewer water main through the post. For the first

[54] Memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of War from the Chief of Staff Regarding the Chittenden Report, October 22, 1908.
[55] Memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of War from the Chief of Staff Regarding the Chittenden Report, October 22, 1908.

time, the needs of the city and Fort Lawton directly conflicted with each other, and Seattle won the first skirmish. The War Department opposed legislation that authorized the right-of-way for the sewer pipe until Major Chittenden sided with City Engineer Thomson. Perhaps recognizing that his actions weakened Fort Lawton's position as an autonomous federal reservation, Chittenden drafted an ambitious plan to reshape Fort Lawton and the surrounding tidelands to enhance its long-term viability as a military post. The War Department's rejection of his plan indicated that the army was satisfied with the size and limited function of the fort as it currently existed, with half of the reservation undeveloped and unused. The coastal artillery emplacements and fortifications planned for Fort Lawton were never constructed, and the post's original mission as part of the defense of Puget Sound was never realized. Instead, it remained a small garrison housing approximately three hundred infantry troops. The army was already planning to build a larger fort in Tacoma, but did not want to abandon the existing infrastructure of Fort Lawton, anticipating it would be useful as a supply depot. Over half of Fort Lawton's 641 acres, including the portion of Magnolia Bluff overlooking Puget Sound, was empty and undeveloped. In Seattle, John Olmstead's 1903 plan for a scenic boulevard linking all shorelines remained the Park Commission's goal.

The Olmsted Plan for Fort Lawton

In 1910, Seattle's Park Commissioners proposed that Fort Lawton could be two things at once: a functioning military post and an extension of their network of pleasure drives ringing the city. The War Department's rejection on military grounds delineated a limit to the city's expansive definition of public space. The Chittenden Report, which questioned the future viability of Fort Lawton, had given park planners renewed momentum. Having exhausted the

original $1.5 million raised in bonds and seeking to raise an additional $2 million to complete the network of parkways, the Park Commission now looked to Fort Lawton to extend their planned pleasure drives.

In November 1909, John C. Olmsted visited Seattle and met with the President of the Park Commission, E. C. Cheasty. During their meeting, they discussed the future of Fort Lawton. Cheasty hoped the War Department would completely abandon the post and turn it over to the city for use as a park. However, he acknowledged that this would be unpopular among the Seattle business community and residents. He sought to collaborate with Olmsted to achieve a balance: maintaining a long-term military presence at Fort Lawton while supporting the park system. He provided Olmsted with the city's copy of the Chittenden Report and map. Cheasty requested that Olmsted develop a proposal that the city could submit to the War Department regarding improvements to the fort in conjunction with the system of parks and boulevards.[56]

Later that month, Olmsted contacted the Park Commissioners regarding their unfinished system and the Chittenden Report. He was impressed by the report's breadth and aimed to propose something equally ambitious "in particular regard to the landscape enhancement of the reservation."[57] He envisioned creating scenic drives through the military reservation that would connect to the Magnolia Bluffs Parkway along Seattle's western edge, allowing visitors to enjoy the view of the Olympic Mountains framed by the Puget Sound. Olmsted also planned to recommend upgrades to the military facilities, such as a new drill hall and officers' club, to make the fort more advantageous for the army.[58]

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[56] John C. Olmsted Field Notes, November 26, 1909. OAR, LC.
[57] Letter from John C. Olmsted to the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners, November 30, 1909. OAR, LC.
[58] Letter from John C. Olmsted to the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners, November 30, 1909.

The Seattle Board of Park Commissioners wrote to Secretary of War J. M. Dickinson, to request that the army authorize a board of officers to work with Olmsted on a new plan for Fort Lawton that would incorporate park functions.[59] The army's head of logistics, Quartermaster General J. B. Aleshire, raised two concerns that made him hesitate to endorse the request. First, the funds for post improvements were allocated annually by Congress at the beginning of the fiscal year. The War Department distributed them on a proportional basis, and the regional departments decided which fort within their jurisdiction received funds for facility improvements based on competing needs. The Department of the Columbia managed many installations in addition to Fort Lawton, all vying for their limited budget. In a letter to the Secretary of War, General Aleshire speculated that Washington State's Senator Samuel Piles would use Olmsted's report on Fort Lawton to justify a special appropriation to make the facility useful to Seattle's park system. This possibility of subordinating the military's principal control of Fort Lawton led to Aleshire's second concern, stating, "The fixing-up of this reservation as a part of the park system of the city might destroy its usefulness as a military reservation."[60] The army's initial response to the Seattle Park Commission was that Fort Lawton had to remain strictly a military facility.

Secretary Dickinson approved an army board to consider Olmsted's recommendations for Fort Lawton. However, in a letter to Senator Piles, he qualified his approval. First, the army board would be directed to consider no plan that exceeded the annual maintenance budget for Fort Lawton set by the Department of the Columbia. Secondly, he stated that the board did not

[59] Letter from Secretary of War Dickinson to Senator Piles, February 21, 1910. Don Sherwood Parks History Collection, 1801-01 (DSPHC), Box 25, Folder 1, SMA.
[60] Memorandum from Quartermaster General Aleshire to Secretary of War Dickinson, January 18, 1910. Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92 (RG 92), Box 6143, Folder 247249, NARA.

represent a commitment by the War Department to improve Fort Lawton.[61] The Senator informed Park Commissioner Cheasty of this decision, who promptly shared the news with the *Seattle Daily Times*.[62] The headline, "Government to Beautify Fort Lawton Grounds," suggested that either Cheasty overlooked the subtlety in the Secretary of War's letter or the newspaper interpreted the significance of the board's formation liberally. The article also mentioned that Senator Piles planned to attach an appropriation to the next annual War Department funding bill to implement the Olmsted plan.[63]

John Olmsted returned to Seattle in May 1910 to meet with the newly appointed army board and begin formulating his plan for the future of Fort Lawton. Park Commissioner Cheasty had previously advised Olmsted that his plans for the park system would be more likely to succeed if they were part of a broader initiative to enhance the utility of Fort Lawton, approved by the board.[64] The Secretary of War had appointed the commanding officer of Fort Lawton, Lieutenant Colonel S. W. Miller, the fort's quartermaster, Captain P. M. Shaffer, and the Chief Engineer, Major C. W. Kutz, to the army board. The four men held their first meeting at Fort Lawton, where they outlined several areas of concern for the army. Colonel Miller's foremost complaint was water shortages.[65] As part of a package of incentives to persuade the army to establish a fort in Seattle in 1896, the city promised to supply the facility with fresh water for a modest fee.[66] During construction, the city had opted to install a six-inch water main to Fort

[61] Letter from Secretary of War Dickinson to Senator Piles, February 21, 1910.
[62] Letter from Senator Piles to Seattle Park Commissioner Cheasty, March 1, 1910. DSPHC, Box 25, Folder 1, SMA.
[63] "Government to Beautify Fort Lawton Grounds," *Seattle Daily Times,* February 27, 1910.
[64] John C. Olmsted Field Notes, December 2, 1909. OAR, LC.
[65] John C. Olmsted Field Notes, May 10, 1909. OAR, LC.
[66] Letter from the City of Seattle to the army Post Committee, February 10, 1896. RG 92, Box 1067, Folder 86726, NARA.

Lawton, which the War Department deemed insufficient for the post's requirements.[67] Fourteen years later, the expansion of neighborhoods surrounding Fort Lawton had significantly limited the availability of fresh water for the soldiers. Captain Shaffer highlighted waste disposal as his primary issue that needed attention. The inadequacy of the rifle range was discussed extensively, and Colonel Miller dismissed Chittenden's suggestion to create a new range on the tidelands southwest of the bluff. He informed Olmsted that a standard rifle bullet could be lethal from up to two miles away, and any range that directed rifle fire towards a populated area was a disaster waiting to happen.[68]

Olmsted took two months to compile his report and a sketch map of his plan for Fort Lawton. On July 5, 1910, he submitted it to the army. It is hard to imagine a more inopportune time for the city of Seattle to request funding and assistance from the officers at Fort Lawton. The post's soldiers belonged to the 25th Infantry Regiment, one of four African American regiments in the army. A soldier, Private Nathaniel Bledser, had been accused of attempting to rape a white woman in June.[69] After his arrest, a public outcry for the removal of Black soldiers from Fort Lawton persisted throughout the summer, despite President Taft's refusal to consider relocating the regiment before a thorough investigation.[70] The ranking officer on the army board, Lieutenant Colonel Miller, faced accusations from a Seattle real estate agent of neglecting the concerns of local citizens regarding the behavior of his troops, which led an allied congressman

[67] Letter from the Quartermaster General to Captain W.W. Robinson, February 28, 1898. FHLC, Box 1, Folder 9, SMA.
[68] John C. Olmsted Field Notes, May 10, 1909.
[69] "Bledser Eager to Get Inside Penitentiary," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 9, 1910.
[70] Letter from President William H. Taft to Secretary of War J.M. Dickinson, June 8, 1910. *William H. Taft Papers: Series 8: Letterbooks, 1872 to 1921; Presidential; Vol. 16,1910 May 29-June 23*, LC.

to demand a War Department investigation into Miller.[71] Amid the controversy, John Olmsted, representing the Seattle Park Commissioners, proposed a plan to transform Fort Lawton from a military facility into a dual-use garrison for troops and an extension of Seattle's park system funded by the War Department.

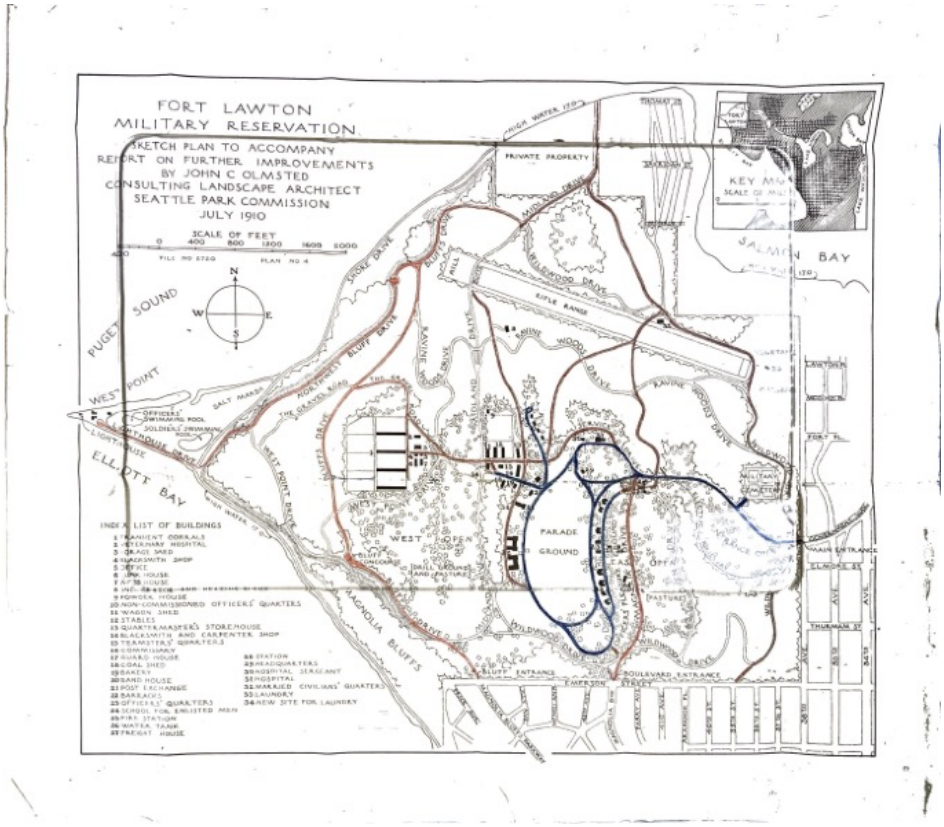

Figure 9 John C. Olmsted, "Fort Lawton Military Reservation Sketch Plan to Accompany Report on Further Improvements," July 11, 1910. RG 393, Box 20, Folder 5656, NARA

Olmsted's report begins with a brief description of Magnolia Bluff and the surrounding neighborhood and street grid. He then outlined his 1903 plan for a comprehensive system of parks and boulevards throughout Seattle. He reaffirmed the assumption made in his 1903 plan

[71] Letter from William Mackay to Representative Will E. Humphrey, August 18, 1910. RG 94, Box 6164, Folder 1664218, NARA; Inspector General's Memorandum, September 15, 1910. Records of the Office of the Inspector General, Record Group 159, Box 112, Folder 11118, NARA.

that the War Department would finance an extension of the Magnolia Bluffs Parkway, which the city had approved a new bond of $2 million to complete, through Fort Lawton. Olmsted wrote,

> The City having provided funds for its portion of this great pleasure drive and walk, it is believed that the time has arrived for the United States Government to further improve the Reservation not only for the strictly military purposes of the post, but also for the comfort and enjoyment of the officers and soldiers and their families, and incidentally by the public under suitable regulations, in such portions, at such times and in such manner as will not conflict with the military uses of the property.[72]

Olmsted and the Seattle Park Commission considered it a reasonable proposal to the War Department that would enhance the reservation and benefit Seattle's citizens. After all, the federal government provided the entirety of Seattle to private citizens through land grants and funded a ship canal that would link Lake Washington with the ocean. Olmsted envisioned Fort Lawton as both an army post and a city park, serving dual purposes. A closer look at his plan shows that the more Fort Lawton was modified to function as a park, the less capable it became as a military post.

Olmsted covered his recommendations to enhance the military utility of Fort Lawton first before moving on to the parkway system, which he was truly interested in. He proposed clearing tracts of forest to the east and west of the central cluster of buildings on Fort Lawton, creating new pasture lands for horses. To address persistent water shortages, he suggested that the army install an electric pump on the existing city water pipe and advocate for the municipality to lay a larger one. To tackle the trash problem army board member Captain Shaffer raised, he proposed purchasing a large incinerator. To enhance the aesthetics of the post, he recommended burying

[72] John C. Olmsted, "Special Report on the Improvement of Fort Lawton Military Reservation, Seattle, Washington," July 5, 1910.

the electrical lines and constructing ornamental bridges to replace the “present cheap and ugly wooden trestles.”[73] To improve Fort Lawton’s facilities, Olmsted suggested the army build a large indoor drill hall, a schoolhouse to provide remedial education for soldiers, swimming pools near the western boundary for recreation, and an officers’ clubhouse for social events.[74] His plan was designed to appeal to the members of the army board and address the complaints they had shared with him. He hoped the War Department would conclude that implementing his plan was in its best interests.

After outlining his recommendations for enhancing the military’s facilities, Olmsted shifted focus to his primary goal: persuading the army to finance an extension of Seattle’s parkway system. Specifically, he aimed for the Magnolia Bluffs Parkway to extend along the western edge of Fort Lawton. The parkway began several miles southwest of Fort Lawton, closely following the coastline until it reached the southern boundary of the post. Olmsted envisioned the army building a new road connecting with the parkway and extending north through the Fort Lawton reservation before veering east at the northern shoreline, crossing the post's width, and looping south through forested areas to return to the starting point. He also proposed several new routes through Fort Lawton that would link the central cluster of buildings with his proposed new construction and swimming pools on the western edge. In summarizing his plan, Olmsted noted, "it is clearly understood by the city that Fort Lawton is not to be insidiously turned into what would be practically a public park at the expense of the United States government.”[75] He did acknowledge that a surge of visitors to the fort would interfere with

[73] John C. Olmsted, “Special Report on the Improvement of Fort Lawton Military Reservation, Seattle, Washington.”
[74] John C. Olmsted, “Special Report on the Improvement of Fort Lawton Military Reservation, Seattle, Washington.”
[75] John C. Olmsted, “Special Report on the Improvement of Fort Lawton Military Reservation, Seattle, Washington.”

daily operations, so he suggested that the military fund an iron fence around the central area of Fort Lawton and place sentries at strategic points, creating a physical barrier between the troops and the western section of their post, which would be reserved for pleasure drives and promenades.[76]

Olmsted's plan contained a fundamental flaw: it did not include an alternate site for the rifle range. His proposed pleasure drives were directly in the line of fire from the rifle range and well within the effective range of the .30 caliber bullets used by the army.[77] Some secondary roads crossed the narrow range, and the main parkway along the bluff ran directly behind it. Although there were butts and a hill at the end of the range to stop bullets, any shots to the right or left of the range corridor, as well as ricochets, would cross over the proposed pleasure drives. The risk of hitting a family walking along the proposed drive was immense. If Olmsted's plan had been implemented, either the parkway would have needed to be frequently blocked to accommodate rifle practice, or the range would have had to be shut down to accommodate the city's greenway. As an infantry post, Fort Lawton's range was the centerpiece of military training. Its restriction or elimination would render it completely untenable as an army post.

Olmsted submitted his report to the War Department in July 1910. The army board of three officers began assessing the plans. In Washington, D.C., Senator Piles, who had not run for reelection and would leave office in March 1911, continued his campaign to secure funding for the Olmsted Plan.[78] In October, the army's Adjutant General sent a letter to the Department of

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[76] John C. Olmsted, "Special Report on the Improvement of Fort Lawton Military Reservation, Seattle, Washington."
[77] War Department, *Firing Regulations for Small Arms for the United States Army and the Organized Militia*, 39, 176.
[78] United States Congress, "Piles, Samuel Henry," accessed February 10, 2025, https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/P000351.

the Columbia inquiring about the board's report. The Department explained that two board members had been engaged in field maneuvers during the summer, and the engineer, Major Kutz, would not return to Seattle until November. The board did not convene until December, and their report was forwarded to the War Department in January 1911. If the army aimed to delay the board's report until there was not enough time for Senator Piles to submit a supplemental appropriation in the congressional budget cycle, they executed their plan successfully.

The army board's response to the Olmsted Plan began with a review of their convening instructions, particularly the Secretary of War's directive that no alteration of Fort Lawton could exceed the annual maintenance budget. The board stated, "A literal compliance with its instructions would prevent the Board from considering the Olmsted plan."[79] Nevertheless, the army board examined the Olmsted proposal point by point. They noted that clearing pasture lands would be prohibitively expensive and would have limited military utility. They fully agreed with Olmsted's proposal to address the water shortages. However, they disagreed with the recommendation to install a large incinerator, citing a lack of real need, despite the concept having originated from them. They considered burying electrical lines and constructing a new, more ornamental bridge unnecessary. They did not oppose building a new drill hall, school, and officers' clubhouse, recognizing the military value of their addition. They believed the swimming pools were too far from the central cluster of buildings to be functional. Olmsted's proposal for new parkways and roads through Fort Lawton was considered "unnecessarily extensive and would detract from rather than add to the usefulness of the grounds for maneuvering purposes."[80] In summary, the army board repudiated the majority of Olmsted's recommendations.

[79] Record of the Board of Officers Considering the Olmsted Plan for Fort Lawton, January 11, 1911.
[80] Record of the Board of Officers Considering the Olmsted Plan for Fort Lawton, January 11, 1911.

In Washington, D.C., Quartermaster General Aleshire reviewed the board's report. He rejected the entirety of the Olmsted Plan for Fort Lawton, except for the increase in water supply. He confirmed that the army would not allocate funds to construct new buildings, bury electrical lines, build a new bridge, or clear forested land. Regarding Olmsted's vision for connecting Fort Lawton to Seattle's park system, the Quartermaster General determined, "There will be no funds available for the road work recommended by the Board, either during the current fiscal year or the fiscal year 1912."[81] The Secretary of War delayed his response to the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners until April 1911, after Piles had left the Senate.[82] Fort Lawton would not become part of Seattle's park system in 1911.

Conclusion

When the interests of the city and the military were placed in conflict with one another, as they were in Seattle in 1911, the federal government rejected any encroachment on their land or its use. There was a limit to how much they would support urban development in the West. The War Department agreed to allow a sewer pipe under their post as long as the discharge did not negatively impact the troops, but they would not consider essentially relinquishing the western half of their reservation to the city for pleasure drives. No matter how much John Olmsted tried to sidestep the central issue, the city wanted the land, and the military refused. Advocates of the parks movement in Seattle envisioned a comprehensive reorganization of limited space to achieve their ambitious goals, including the land they had previously donated to the military, and

[81] Letter from the Quartermaster General to the Adjutant General, February 11, 1911. RG 92, Box 6143, Folder 247249, NARA.
[82] Letter from the Office of the Secretary of War to the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners, April 25, 1911. DSPHC, Box 25, Folder 1, SMA.

asked the federal government to fund their plans. Since a pleasure drive would not enhance the military's primary mission to use the reservation to house their troops and prepare them for war, they rejected the Olmsted Plan in a manner that forestalled Senator Piles' intention to secure Congressional appropriations to advance the city's vision. Ultimately, the army's decision to repudiate the Olmsted Plan was less about land use and limited funds, and more about who got to decide what happened on the Fort Lawton reservation. The War Department would not cede its authority over the post to accommodate Seattle's system of parks and boulevards.

CONCLUSION

Seattle's residents would have to wait until 1972 for the army to turn Magnolia Bluff over to the city for a park.[1] During the intervening years, Fort Lawton housed thousands of troops and served as a supply depot during World War II, validating the army planners' assessment that the post would be a critical asset during a major war.[2] It fulfilled the Seattle Chamber of Commerce's goal of bringing customers to the city, albeit forty years later than it hoped. Discovery Park opened to the public in 1973 and became the centerpiece of the Seattle park system, validating John C. Olmsted's vision.[3] The park features miles of nature trails, some of which originate from the old rifle range, now the north parking lot. A loop trail traces the outlines of Olmsted's proposed parkway.[4] Today, tens of thousands of annual visitors enjoy having an expansive green space close to the commercial center.

Seattle had an opportunity in 1895 to elevate its relative importance among cities in the Puget Sound. The War Department desired a new army post in the region, and Seattle's boosters leapt at the chance to locate it in their city. The Seattle Chamber of Commerce's bid to construct the new fort in their city was successful, but the businessmen overpromised and underdelivered. The most significant setback was that the Scheuerman family refused to sell their homestead on Salmon Bay to the Chamber. As a result, Fort Lawton was not suited for a regiment of soldiers and never fulfilled the Chamber's high hopes for business growth generated by the federal presence.

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[1] U.S. National Park Service, Pacific Northwest Region, "Fort Lawton: A Record," (Pacific Northwest National Parks and Forests Association, 1983), 28.
[2] U.S. National Park Service, Pacific Northwest Region, "Fort Lawton: A Record," 24-25.
[3] Michael Sweeney, "Discovery Park Decision 'At the Right Time,'" *Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* March 1, 1974.
[4] Friends of Discovery Park, "Way-Finding Map of Discovery Park," accessed May 16, 2025, https://fodp.org/pdfs/DiscoveryParkMap.pdf.

Seattle's boosters considered American soldiers in their city as customers, as long as they were white. When Private Nathaniel Bledser was accused of assaulting a white woman, the city's urban regime quickly reversed its welcoming attitude to one of expulsion. African American soldiers and their families threatened real estate interests in one of Seattle's fastest-growing neighborhoods, and the city's political allies in Congress responded to the controversy by appealing directly to President William Taft. The Commander in Chief was able to see something that Seattle's elite could not: the members of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment represented the power and prerogative of the federal government that was not beholden to their vision of a pro-business and white city.

By 1910, the War Department's focus had shifted away from coastal defense and responding to urban unrest. Fort Lawton became a small garrison for troops and a supply depot to support the army's overseas missions. The Seattle Parks Commission and John Olmsted hoped to use the western half of the post to extend their system of parks and boulevards. Olmsted believed that Fort Lawton could serve as both a military fort and a park. Park planners failed to recognize that army forts were intended to support national defense and preparation for war. Olmsted's pleasure drives would be dangerously close to the fort's rifle range. The Seattle urban regime had relinquished its ability to influence how the land would be used while it was still under federal control. To the army, it was irrelevant whether the site could be beneficial to Seattle's citizens. What mattered was how the land supported their military mission.

Viewing Progressive Era Seattle through its reflection in Fort Lawton illuminates the urban regime that controlled civic functions, its ambitions to use public space to fulfill its goals, and its perception of federal government power as aligned with their success. The city competed with its neighbors to attract business and trade, including the potential benefits of a military

reservation. It was adept in its co-option of the War Department to serve its ends in establishing Fort Lawton, but slow to recognize when the army's mission changed. It relied on its representatives in Congress to secure federal funds and influence the President when Black soldiers impeded some businessmen's goals. It sought opportunities to benefit from the fort's presence, pivoting to propose a dual civic and military use when they hoped to complete John Olmsted's park system. Seattle's urban regime was relentless in pursuing its goals and in growing its city. No challenge seemed insurmountable until it collided with the prerogatives of the War Department. Between 1895 and 1911, it tried repeatedly to steer the course of Fort Lawton so that it would primarily benefit the city, regardless of the impact on the army's mission. The regime's pressure on the federal government to conform to their vision was counterproductive and eroded the complementary economic relationship between cities and military bases that thrived in other communities across the United States. A rewarding partnership between the federal government and urban urban regimes, if Seattle's experience with Fort Lawton is any indication, is grounded in compromise and mutual accommodation for divergent visions.

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