

Historic

WALKING TOUR

DOWNTOWN



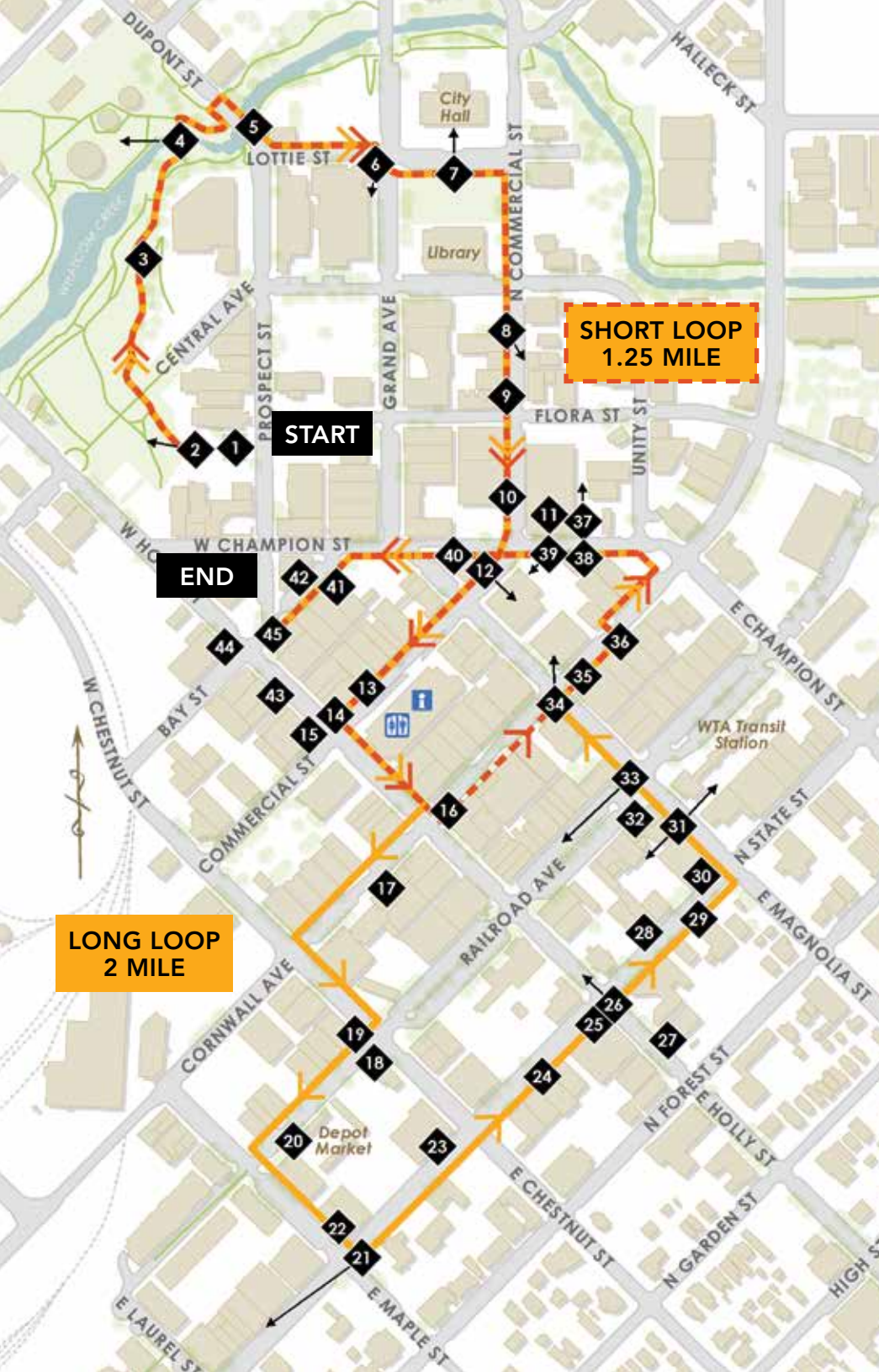
Bellingham, Washington

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

HOW TO USE THIS TOUR

Depending on your time and energy level, you can take the Short Loop (1.25 miles) or the Long Loop (2 miles). Both begin behind the Old City Hall building at 121 Prospect Ave. (#1 on Map), and travel through Maritime Heritage Park and the Whatcom Creek Trail, then on to a more urban environment.

Both loops continue until #16, the Bellingham National Bank, where the Short Loop turns left at Cornwall and Holly, and the Long Loop turns right toward E. Chestnut Street.



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Downtown shoppers at corner of Canoe (now Commercial) and Holly Streets, December 1909. Photo by J.W. Sandison.

DOWNTOWN BELLINGHAM HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

Use this photo-rich tour book to take a trip through time and see how Downtown Bellingham has **evolved**. Since the arrival of the first white settlers in 1853, Downtown's tidal flats have been filled and rocky outcroppings have been leveled. Modes of transportation evolved from travel by foot, boat and horse-drawn wagon to train, streetcar, bus and auto — all of which have shaped Downtown's streets, buildings and landscapes.

Things to consider when walking in Downtown:

Wear comfortable shoes and always watch where you step! The tour mainly follows sidewalks but does travel over some trails and uneven ground.

Take care when crossing streets.

Take breaks as needed. Visit one of the many Downtown restaurants, cafes, and retail shops along the way. Public restrooms are located on the ground floor of the Parkade parking garage on Commercial Street, next to the Visitor Center (marked with an "i" on the map).

#1 Old City Hall

121 Prospect Street

Built 1892

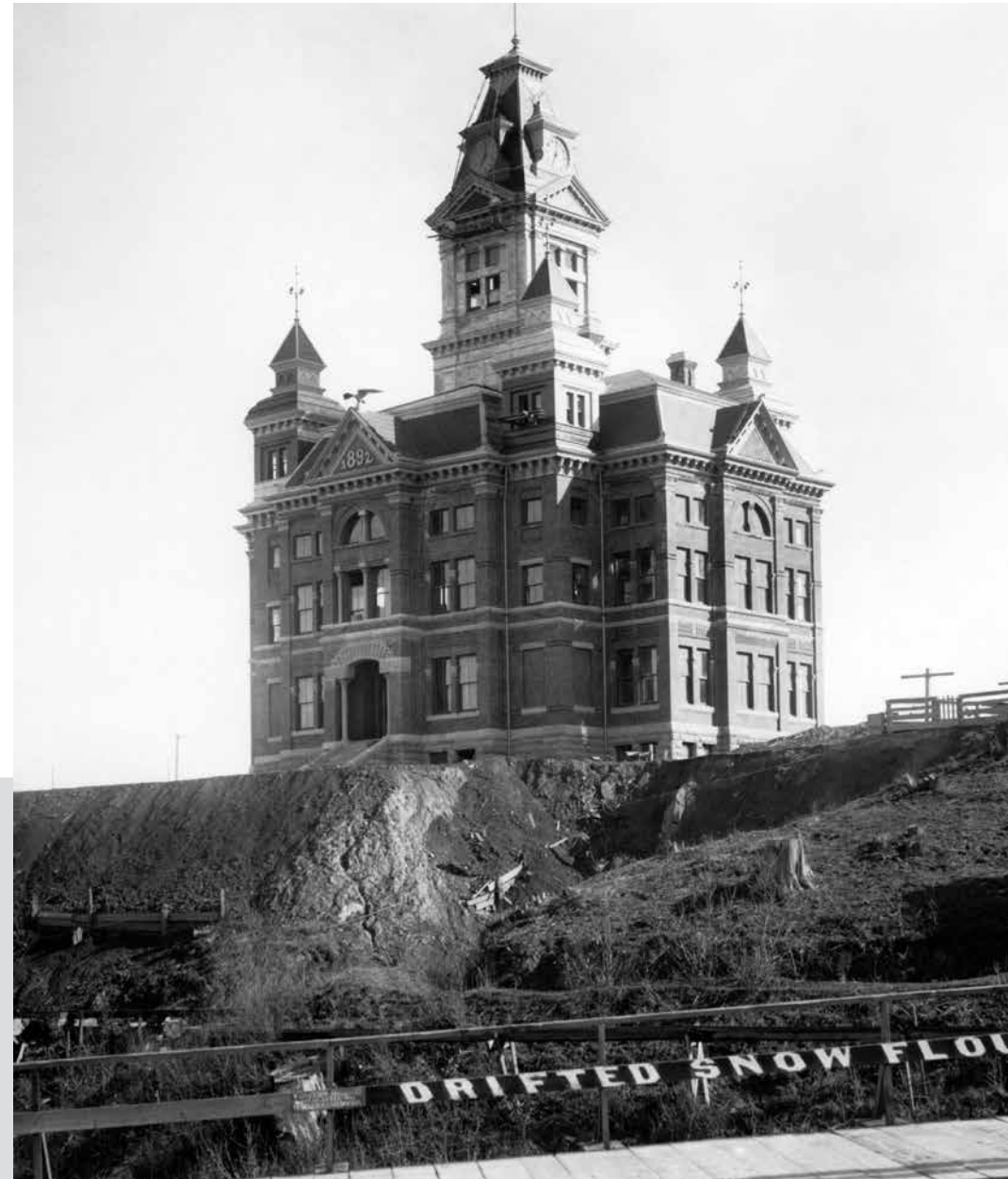
Architect: Alfred Lee

National Register Listed

The tour starts at the site of the Old City Hall (Site #1 on map). This iconic 1892 building was originally the City Hall for New Whatcom, a municipality created by the unification of the pioneer towns of Sehome and Whatcom. Architect Alfred Lee's design, chosen over three others, was an extravagant Victorian meant to display civic superiority over the rival town of Fairhaven. Construction started in boom times, but the economy had entered into a depression as the brick and Chuckanut sandstone building neared completion. The first council meeting in the new City Hall was held on May 9, 1893, with the interior largely unfinished above the first floor, and the tower without clockworks. Upon consolidation of Fairhaven and Whatcom (the "New" was dropped in 1901) the building served as Bellingham's City Hall until 1939. It has been a museum since 1941.

View of Old City Hall from Holly Street, early 1893.

Architect Alfred Lee's design, chosen over three others, was an extravagant Victorian meant to display civic superiority over the rival town of Fairhaven.





#2 Bellingham's First People

The historic photograph above was taken in the mid-1890s, and shows a native encampment on Whatcom Beach at what is today's Maritime Heritage Park. The beach was located at the base of the bluff directly below Old City Hall, and was used as a seasonal fishing camp by both the Lummi and Nooksack Tribes. After establishment of the Whatcom Mill by Henry Roeder and Russell Peabody, the area continued to be used by settlers and natives as a trading and fishing center.

Photo above, mid-1890s.



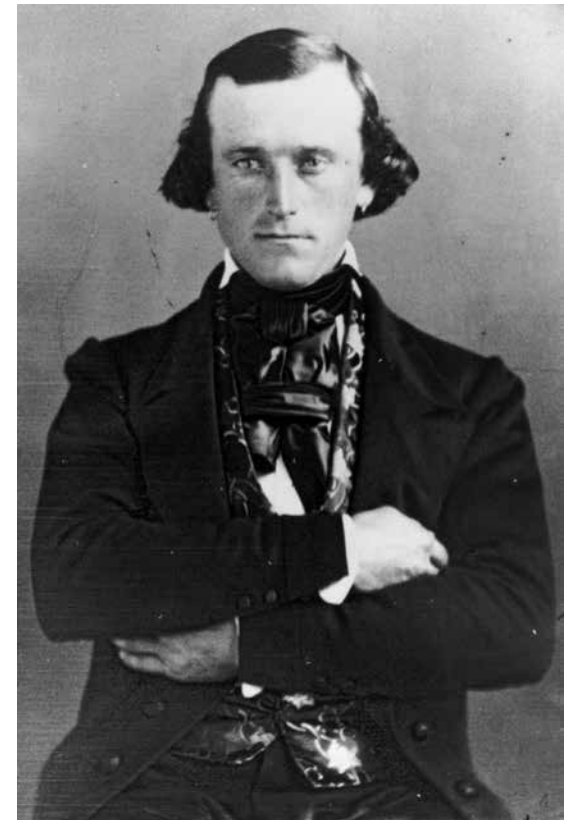
Lured by plentiful old-growth forests, Roeder and Peabody came seeking a waterfall to supply power for their lumber mill.

#3 Whatcom Creek Lumber Mills

The first industry on Bellingham Bay was built by settlers Captain Henry Roeder and Russell Peabody in 1853. Lured by plentiful old-growth forests, the men came seeking a waterfall location to supply power. Lummi Chief Chow'it'sut led the men to the falls at lower Whatcom Creek. The Whatcom Mill operated sporadically for many years but was destroyed by fire in 1873. In 1883 the Washington Colony, a group of pioneers from Kansas, rebuilt the mill, and a mile-long wharf that extended out over the bay to accommodate large ships. A section of "Colony Wharf" exists today as an extension of C Street.

Photo above, Whatcom Mill, mid-1880s.

Photo at right, Captain Henry Roeder, circa 1860s.



#4 Whatcom Creek

The name "Whatcom" comes from the Nooksack word meaning "place of noisy rumbling waters." The mouth of Whatcom Creek was originally an estuary, but over time its mud flats were filled using all types of waste to create land upon which to build. The creek was later dredged to create deeper access for large ships. By the 1920s this area of Whatcom Creek had become an open sewer, and served as the city dump until 1953. In the 1970s environmentalists began restoring Whatcom Creek, and today the former landfills have been reclaimed as riparian areas and parkland. The sewage treatment plant has been repurposed as a fish hatchery.

Map, 1887 US Coast & Geodetic Survey T-Sheet.

In the 1970s environmentalists began restoring Whatcom Creek. Today the former landfill has been reclaimed as a riparian area and is home to Maritime Heritage Park.



#5 Dupont Street Bridge

The 60' long concrete arch bridge which spans Whatcom Creek was built in 1918. In 1856, Captain George Pickett was sent by the U.S. Army to build a fort on Bellingham Bay to protect the four bay towns against Indian raiders from the north. The 1918 bridge replaced an earlier "Military Bridge" built in 1857 to connect Fort Steilacoom in southern Puget Sound with Fort Bellingham. Pickett's Military Bridge is no longer standing, but its approximate location was near the current bridge. Pickett's house, built in 1856 with boards from the Roeder-Peabody mill, still stands today at 910 Bancroft Street (corner of F Street).

Photo at right, Military Bridge circa 1900.

Photo below, Pickett Bridge in 2015.





A story pole tells a Native American legend or folktale, as opposed to a totem pole, which depicts a tribal or family history.

#6 Lummi Story Pole

Lummi tribal members Joseph Hillaire and Herb John carved this story pole in 1952 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the arrival of Russell Peabody and Captain Henry Roeder on Bellingham Bay and the generous treatment they received from the Lummi. Different from a totem pole, which depicts a tribal or family history, a story pole tells a Native American legend or folktale. Hillaire's story pole illustrates the story of the Lummi people, and the figures in the canoe represent Lummi Chief Chow'it'sut, sub-chief Tsi'li'x, Roeder and Peabody. Originally erected at the corner of Lottie and Prospect Streets near Whatcom Creek, the pole was restored and moved to its current location at Lottie Street and Grand Avenue in 2007.

Photo above, Joseph Hillaire by Jack Carver, 1952.

Photo at right, dedication ceremony by Jack Carver, 1952.





The 1939 City Hall was designed in the Art Moderne style, popular for civic buildings at the time.

#7 New City Hall

210 Lottie Street

Built 1939

Architect: Leonard Bindon

National Register Listed

In 1939 this "new" City Hall replaced the 1892 City Hall on Prospect Street. Built under the Public Works Administration (PWA) through the New Deal federal relief program, the Bellingham City Hall is an excellent example of the Art Moderne style. Art Moderne, popular for civic buildings at the time, is closely related to the Art Deco style but more streamlined in its decorative ornament. The building retains its stylized architectural elements of chrome hardware, glass brick window walls, and most notably the sculptural figures over the building's main entrance. The two outer figures represent family and labor (one holds a baby, the other a saw), while the middle figure holds a book, representing knowledge and wisdom.

Photo above, City Hall in the early 1940s.

Photo at right, three sculptures over entry. Courtesy Jim Talbot, 2011.





#8 Downtown Living

210 and 214 N. Commercial Street
Built circa 1900
Architect: unknown

In the early 1900s downtown Bellingham had a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings. Houses designed in the popular Queen Anne style lined the streets, two of which remain at 210 and 214 N. Commercial Street. By the 1920s, as housing began to be developed on the outskirts of town along new street car lines, downtown buildings shifted from wood frame residential houses to predominantly masonry business office and commercial buildings.

Photo courtesy Whatcom County Assessor, date unknown.



#9 Gilbert Flats

201 N. Commercial Street
Built 1906
Architect: unknown

The Classical Revival style Gilbert Flats (today's Avalon Apartments) was one of downtown's first apartment buildings. The Bellingham Herald described the building, named after its owner Dr. O.C. Gilbert, a dentist, as "the leading fashionable apartment house in the city and the most modern." Modern features included speaking tubes, and electric buttons that closed the street doors from the second floor.

Photo courtesy Gordon Tweit, 1995.

#10 Bellingham Hotel

119 N. Commercial Street

Built 1929

Architect: Robert C. Reamer

The Bellingham Hotel (today's Bellingham Towers) represents the last and largest structure built downtown during Bellingham's pre-Depression building boom. Its architect, Robert C. Reamer, also designed the Mt. Baker Theatre. Designed to be a major building in the "Metropolitan District", the 15-story hotel provided both public and private space for entertainment and accommodations. The Art Deco style skyscraper operated as the Bellingham Hotel from 1930-73.

View from roof of the Montague and McHugh Department Store (today's Crown Plaza), 1932.





The Mount Baker Theatre, originally used for both stage performance and film, marked the transition from vaudeville to movie theaters.

#11 Mt. Baker Theatre

100 N. Commercial Street

Built 1927

Architect: Robert C. Reamer

National Register Listed

The Spanish-Moorish style theatre was developed at the end of the prosperous 1920s by the Metropolitan Building Company, an investment syndicate in Seattle that wanted to broaden its aim and create a new "Metropolitan District" in downtown Bellingham. The Mount Baker Theatre, originally used for both stage performance and film, marked the transition from vaudeville to movie theaters. By the 1920s and through most of the decade, silent films were becoming more and more popular.

Photo by J.W. Sandison, 1927.

#12 Montague & McHugh Department Store

114 W. Magnolia Street

Built 1927

Architect: John Graham

National Register Listed

Along with the Mt. Baker Theatre and the Bellingham Hotel, one of downtown's most ambitious projects was the Montague and McHugh Department Store. Designed in the Beaux Arts style (French for "fine arts") and faced with ornate glazed terra cotta, the building was the first to be developed in the "Metropolitan District" and was one of Bellingham's finest department stores. During World War II the building was used as a bomb casing factory, but in post-war times it again served downtown shoppers as the Bon Marche. *View of building from corner of Magnolia and Commerical Streets, circa 1930.*





Built for Samuel Altshuler's Red Front Clothing Store, over the last hundred years this building has housed a variety of businesses.

#13 Red Front Building

200 W. Holly Street

Built 1900

Architect: William Cox

Although the red brick of the Romanesque style Red Front Building has been painted, it still retains most of its original architectural features and ornamentation. Built for Samuel Altshuler's Red Front Clothing Store, over the last hundred years the building has housed a variety of businesses. The upper floor operated as the Savoy Hotel from 1915 to the early 1960s. Engraved in stone above the building's front column, the words "Canoe St" mark the name of the street before it was changed to "Commercial."

Photo above by J.W. Sandison, December 1909.

Photo at right, Red Front Building in 2015.



#14 Streets with Two Names

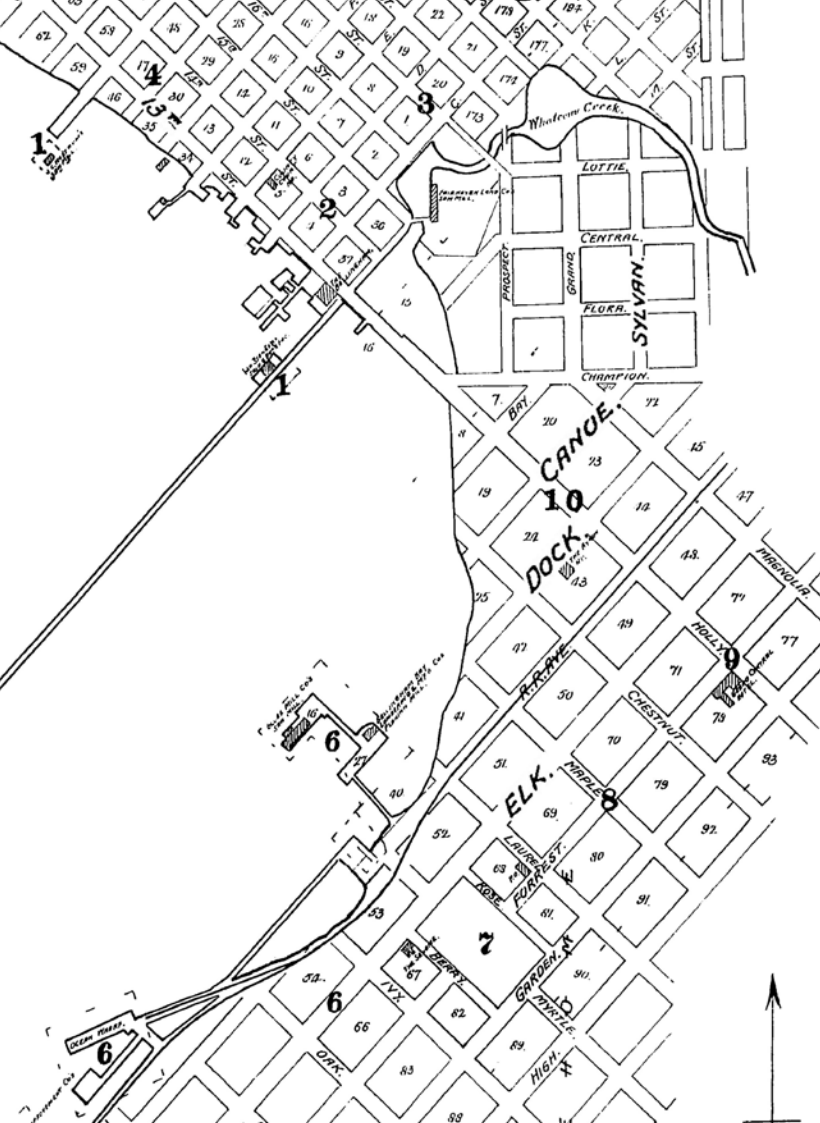
In 1889 the Whatcom Creek Estuary was bridged, linking the towns of Whatcom and Sehome and furthering connections and commercial opportunities for what would soon become downtown Bellingham. After the 1904 City of Bellingham consolidation, 106 street names were changed to eliminate duplications that arose during the settlement of the four towns. Streets with descriptive names suggesting frontier life were given more generic names common to other cities, or changed to pay tribute to city forefathers. For example "Elk" and "Canoe/Sylvan" were changed to "State" and "Commercial." "Dock" was changed to "Cornwall" to honor Pierre Barlow Cornwall, an early investor in several Bellingham industries.

Image at right, 1890 Sanborn Map.

Photo below shows the construction of the Holly Street bridge that connected the Towns of Whatcom and Sehome, 1888.



Bellingham Bay.



In the 1920s, streets with names suggesting frontier life like "Elk" and "Canoe" were given more generic names common to other cities, or changed to pay tribute to city forefathers.



#15 The Clover Block

201 W. Holly Street
Built 1902
Architect: unknown

The Clover Block was designed in the Beaux Arts style in an "H-plan" configuration that created two second story light courts, and skylights to maximize light to interior rooms. The ground floor had deeply recessed entries and plate glass windows to display goods, and the second floor offices each had its own sink with hot and cold water. The building is named after the popular poem "Four-Leaf Clover" by Ella Higginson (1861-1940). Higginson became poet laureate of Washington State in 1931. Her celebrated poem was inspired by a clover she saw in 1890 while walking in the Old Orchard Tract, today's Orchard Terrace Condominiums at 901 N. Forest Street. *Photo of the Clover Block at corner of Holly and Commercial Streets, August 1915.*

Four-Leaf Clover By Ella Higginson

I know a place where the sun is like gold,
 And the cherry blooms burst with snow,
 And down underneath is the loveliest nook,
 Where the four-leaf clovers grow.

One leaf is for hope, and one is for faith,
 And one is for love, you know,
 And God put another in for luck-
 If you search, you will find where they grow.

But you must have hope, and you must have faith,
 You must love and be strong - and so -
 If you work, if you wait, you will find the place
 Where the four-leaf clovers grow.

#16 Bellingham National Bank

101 E. Holly Street

Built 1912

Architects: F. Stanley Piper and John Graham
National Register Listed

The five-story Chicago style Bellingham National Bank building was dramatically different from the Victorian and Romanesque buildings built by railroad speculators in the late 19th century. The semi-circular fanlight over the business lobby entrance and the shallow, black cast iron bays were decorative features not often seen in Bellingham. Until the Bellingham Herald finished its ornate Gothic Revival building in 1926 at 1155 N. State Street, the Bellingham National Bank was the city's most prestigious business address, with many prominent doctors' and lawyers' offices on the upper floors.

Postcard at right, 1912 version of F. Stanley Piper's drawing.

Photo below was taken in 2009 by Jim Talbot.





#17 Leopold Hotel

1206 Cornwall Avenue

Built 1929

Architect: H.L. Stevens Co. of San Francisco
National Register Listed

The nine-story Mission style Leopold Hotel was the third to be built in conjunction with two earlier buildings. The 1899 Byron House Hotel was the first to be built, with a smaller building being added to the south in 1913. In 1929 the Leopold Hotel was added to this ensemble, and the buildings stood side-by-side for 38 years until the Byron House Hotel was demolished in 1967. The 1929 Leopold Hotel had 150 rooms equipped with radio speakers and "modern" desk-style telephones with hand-held receivers. When *Call of the Wild* was filmed in 1935 on Mount Baker, 60 members of the cast and crew stayed at the hotel, including Clark Gable and Loretta Young (with her chaperone). Other distinguished guests were President William H. Taft and child star Shirley Temple.

Photo at right shows the Leopold Hotel under construction, 1929.

Photo above was taken in 2015.



When *Call of the Wild* was filmed in 1935 on Mount Baker, 60 members of the cast and crew stayed at the hotel, including Clark Gable and Loretta Young.



#18 Milwaukee Road Freight Station

200 E. Chestnut Street

Built 1943

Architect: unknown

The Milwaukee Railroad took over the Bellingham Bay & British Columbia (BB&BC) Railway around 1911. The station pictured above was built in the 1940s and served the railroad until 1980, when the Milwaukee Railroad went into bankruptcy. The building was repurposed in the late 1990s as the La Fiamma pizza restaurant.

Photo above, circa 1969.

Photo at right courtesy of La Fiamma, 2008.



#19 Washington Grocery Company Warehouse

1125 Railroad Avenue

Built 1912

Architect: unknown

National Register Listed

Stephen Glascock built this three-story concrete building as the Washington Grocery Company headquarters. The warehouse was oriented toward Railroad Avenue, and a spur connected it to the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad for easy loading. This southern end of Railroad Avenue was a warehouse district that served the needs of many wholesale businesses in the early 20th century including auto garages, machine and boiler shops, light industrial sheds, and lodging houses for workers. It continued to serve as a warehouse district until World War II.

Photo of building circa 1930.





#20 Former site of BB&BC Train Passenger Depot

1100 Railroad Avenue (today's Depot Market)

Built 1891

Architect: unknown

The Bellingham Bay & British Columbia (BB&BC) train depot once stood on the same block between Chestnut and Maple Streets where the Depot Market now stands. The local BB&BC built the depot in 1891 for passenger service and hand freight, which was delivered to nearby businesses by using a "dray" (a strong, low cart). In 1892 the railroad company built the BB&BC Hotel next to the station to accommodate the droves of passengers arriving in downtown Bellingham.

Photo above, circa 1905.

Photo at right taken from same viewpoint in 2014.





#21 State Street - Frontier Road to Commercial Corridor

State Street was originally named Elk Street and began as a muddy road servicing the Sehome Mine in the 1850s. The Sehome Mine was located near what is today the intersection of Laurel Street and Railroad Avenue. Improvements were made to Elk in the late 1800s by adding wood planks to muddy roads and sidewalks to keep people, horses, and wagons moving smoothly. By 1904 with the consolidation of the City of Bellingham, the street had evolved into a fully-fledged urban corridor paved in brick and serviced by a main streetcar line, with stately masonry buildings along both sides of the street. The original name of "Elk" was changed to "State" in 1926 to reflect the metamorphosis from frontier town to metropolitan center.

Photo at right is a view down Elk Street (now State Street) looking north, circa 1886.

Photo above is a view down Elk Street looking south, 1889.

By 1904 with the consolidation of the City of Bellingham, Elk (now State) Street had evolved into a fully-fledged urban corridor paved in brick and serviced by a main streetcar line, with stately masonry buildings along both sides of the street.



#22 Scottish Rite Temple/Masonic Hall

1101 N. State Street

Built 1905

Architect: Proctor [John G.] & Farrell of Tacoma

The exotic character of the Egyptian Revival style Masonic Hall is created by the large concrete lotus columns and its vertical cast iron ornamentation at the parapet on the front and south side façades. Fraternal lodges and secret societies were popular ways for men to socialize in the late 19th century. The Masons, or freemasons, were one of these popular societies. The Masons organized a lodge in Bellingham as early as 1883, and in 1905 when the Scottish Rite Temple/Masonic Hall was built, the "Blue Lodge" Bellingham Masons had a membership of 200.

Photo, late 1930s.

#23 Herald Building

1155 N. State Street

Built 1926

Architect: F. Stanley Piper w/ Earl Wilson

Morrison & Van Salisbury Stimson

National Register Listed

The Gothic Revival style Bellingham Herald Building was constructed of steel, and faced in terra cotta and stone. The Herald newspaper began as the 1890s Fairhaven Herald, changing its name to "Bellingham" Herald after the city consolidated in 1904. Promoters originally wanted to call it the "Metropolitan Building," indicative of the city's evolution during the prosperous 1920s. With the addition of the new six-story Herald Building, the corridor was considered so important to downtown that 50 merchants on Elk Street petitioned the City Council to change the street's name to the more metropolitan "State" Street, which was accomplished on April 13, 1926.

Photo by J.W. Sandison, 1926.



With the addition of the new six-story Herald Building, the corridor was considered so important to downtown that 50 merchants on Elk Street petitioned the City Council to change the name to the more metropolitan "State" Street, which was accomplished on April 13, 1926.



Originally a 51-room hotel, in its prime the Laube Hotel featured a lobby for travelling salesmen's displays and had an 80-seat café.

#24 Hotel Laube

1224 N. State Street

Built 1904

Architect: Unknown

National Register Listed

N. State Street had a concentration of turn-of-the-century hotels that served business people and visitors before the newer, larger Bellingham and Leopold Hotels were built in the late 1920s. Originally a 51-room hotel, in its prime the Laube was served by the north-south streetcar, featured a lobby for travelling salesmen's displays and had an 80-seat café. By the 1930s, the Laube had lost its stylishness and was primarily used as inexpensive single-room lodging. In 2008 the Laube was rehabilitated into 20 affordable apartments and two commercial spaces by the Bellingham Housing Authority.

Photo above shows the Laube Hotel in 1904.

Photo at right is the Laube in 2010.





#25 Exchange Building

1248 N. State Street
Built 1908
Architect: James C. Teague

The Exchange Building, named in reference to the 1903 New York Stock Exchange building, was intended to give businesses a centralized location in the new City of Bellingham. Building owners Samuel and Joseph Alsop began their ascent to wealth as butchers and went on to make a fortune in salmon trapping. In 1923 the building was repurposed as the Hotel Henry, and in 1942 the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) moved into the building from its location across the street (311 E. Holly Street, Site #27). In 1968 the building was "modernized" and covered with a gold mesh façade that obscured the "old fashioned" brick work. The mesh was removed in 1992, revealing the original brick detailing and scrolled corbels at the top floor cornice.

Photo at right, Galen Biery, 1974.

Photo above shows the building uncovered and its original architectural features restored.



In 1968 the building was "modernized" and covered with a gold mesh façade that obscured the "old fashioned" brick work.

#26 Old State Hwy 99/ E. Holly Street

Before the Interstate Highway system came to Bellingham in the 1960s, State Highway 99 was the major route for all points north and south and brought crowds of prospective customers directly through downtown along Holly Street. From the 1920s through the 1950s, downtown Bellingham was a bustling hub for travelers as well as for local shoppers and diners. J.C. Penny's, Woolworth's, Newberry's, Montgomery Ward, Sears, and other major national chains all had retail stores downtown. By the 1950s, downtown began experiencing traffic congestion and parking shortages, and in the 1960s, much of the through traffic was being diverted to the new Interstate-5.

Photo at right, E. Holly Street circa 1950. The "Imperial Cafe" in the photo foreground is now the "Horseshoe Cafe."

Photo below by Jack Carver, 1958, shows the interior of the Imperial Cafe.



From the 1920s through the 1950s, downtown Bellingham was a bustling hub for travelers as well as for local shoppers and diners.

#27 YMCA

311 E. Holly Street

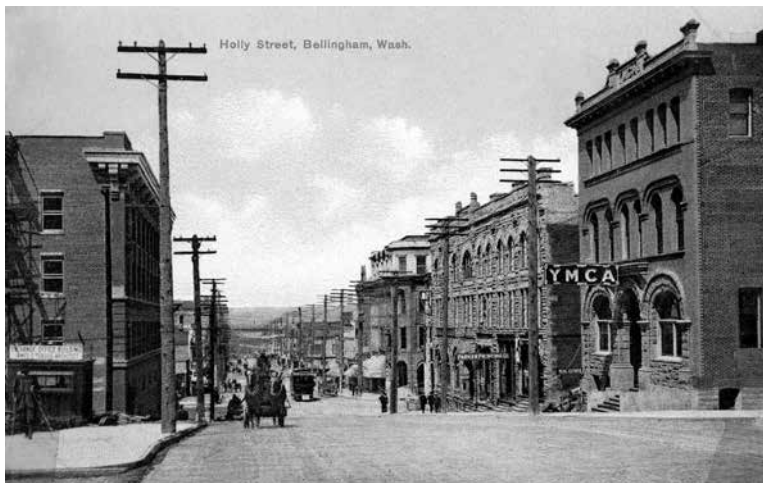
Built 1906

Architect: Alfred Lee

This Richardsonian Romanesque style building with a façade heavily clad in Chuckanut sandstone was Bellingham's first Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) building. Its architect, Alfred Lee, also designed the 1892 City Hall. The building originally had offices and a gymnasium on the first floor, and the upper floors had dormitory rooms and small apartments. In 1942, the YMCA moved to the former Hotel Henry on State Street, and the International Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) purchased the building and occupied it until the late 1970s. Like the Masons and the Elks, the I.O.O.F. was a benevolent fraternal organization.

Photo at right, 1908.

Photo below is a postcard from 1907.





#28 Dahlquist Building

1311-1313 N. State Street

Built 1907-08

Architect: James C. Teague

This building was constructed for Thomas Dahlquist to house his Bellingham Bay Grocery Company and was designed by James Teague, the architect of the Exchange Building at 1248 N. State Street. Teague created letters in the niches at the cornice above the third floor windows, which spell out the name "Dahlquist." Dahlquist claimed to have the oldest grocery business in Bellingham, dating back to the early logging days, and told of delivering groceries by wheelbarrow to shacks in the wilderness, as far as today's Franklin Street.

Photo above, 1912, with the Dahlquist Building in the foreground.

Photo at right shows building in 2014.





#29 Union Depot

1322 N. State Street

Built 1922

Architect: Frank C. Burns

This building was originally built as the station for the interurban electric streetcars and motor buses. Similar to today's shuttle bus, the interurban "stage" service made connections to Whatcom County destinations such as Lynden and Ferndale. In 1922, the interurban served 17 stage lines and completed 77 daily trips. Puget Sound Power & Light owned and operated the interurban, which ended passenger service in 1928 as the buses ultimately proved more popular and cost efficient. In 1930, Puget Sound Power & Light moved to its new building across the street (1329 N. State Street – Site #30), and with it went the bus depot.

Photo above, the building on opening day in 1922 by J.W. Sandison.

Photo at right shows the building in 2014.



#30 Puget Sound Power & Light Building

1329 N. State Street

Built 1930

Architect: unknown

This buff colored brick building was originally the home office of the Puget Sound Power & Light Company. The decorative caps on the pilasters at the roofline are indicative of the building's Art Deco influences. The "stage depot" on the first floor had been relocated from the old Union Depot across the street, and had a covered concourse to protect passengers from the rain. The first floor housed the ticket office, restrooms, a restaurant, barber shop, and soda fountain. Greyhound acquired the bus service in 1948, and operated from the building until it moved to the new Pacific Terminal in Fairhaven in the 1980s.

Photo by Jack Carver, 1953.





#31 Alley Freight Delivery

The rail tracks in the alley are a remnant of a once-busy work area between N. State Street and Railroad Avenue. The Northern Pacific Railway bought the Bellingham Bay and Eastern (BB&E) railway line and laid spur tracks in this alley around 1903. The alleys were used by the trains to offload freight behind the stores. The Northern Pacific Railroad loading docks, which once lined the alley and facilitated movement of freight on and off rail cars, have largely been removed, but remnants of doors and former openings can be seen a few feet above grade, indicating where a loading dock previously existed.

Photo of a Northern Pacific rail car crossing Maple Street in the alley between N. State Street and Railroad Avenue, mid-1950s. Courtesy Terrance Wahl.

#32 Spokane Building

1322 Railroad Avenue

Built 1903

Architect: F.C. Burns

The Spokane Building has been used as a feed store ever since it was built for Franklin J. Farley. The building was financed by investors from Spokane, Washington, who built on speculation of an east-west railroad connection from Bellingham to Spokane. In 1923, George Hohl's firm moved in to sell fertilizer and poultry supplies. The company became Hohl's Feed & Seed in 1945 and shared the building with grain operators Farley-Clark Inc. and Clark Feed & Seed. The second floor was generally known to have been operated as a brothel, which was legal in Bellingham until 1948. The upstairs lodging house operated from 1904-24 and was called the Spokane House (or Hotel) from 1925-48.

Photo by Jack Carver, April 1960.



The second floor was generally known to have been operated as a brothel. Such "houses of ill repute" were legal in Bellingham until 1948.



#33 Railroad Avenue

Railroad Avenue was considered downtown's "workhorse" street. Designed to accommodate four sets of tracks for freight delivery from the Bellingham Bay & British Columbia (BB&BC) Railroad, Railroad Avenue attracted machinery and repair shops, warehouses, agricultural supply and manufacturing businesses. As downtown matured and became more "metropolitan", not only did the noise of the trains disturb business owners, visitors, and residents, but they also blocked automobile traffic. A Bellingham Herald editorial claimed that "the running of trains through the heart of the city... is no longer tolerable [and] the injury to retail business property is enormous." The rail line was decommissioned by 1980.

Photo of Railroad Avenue near the Chestnut Street intersection by J.W. Sandison, circa 1914.

#34 Bellingham Federal Building

104 W. Magnolia Street

Built 1912-13

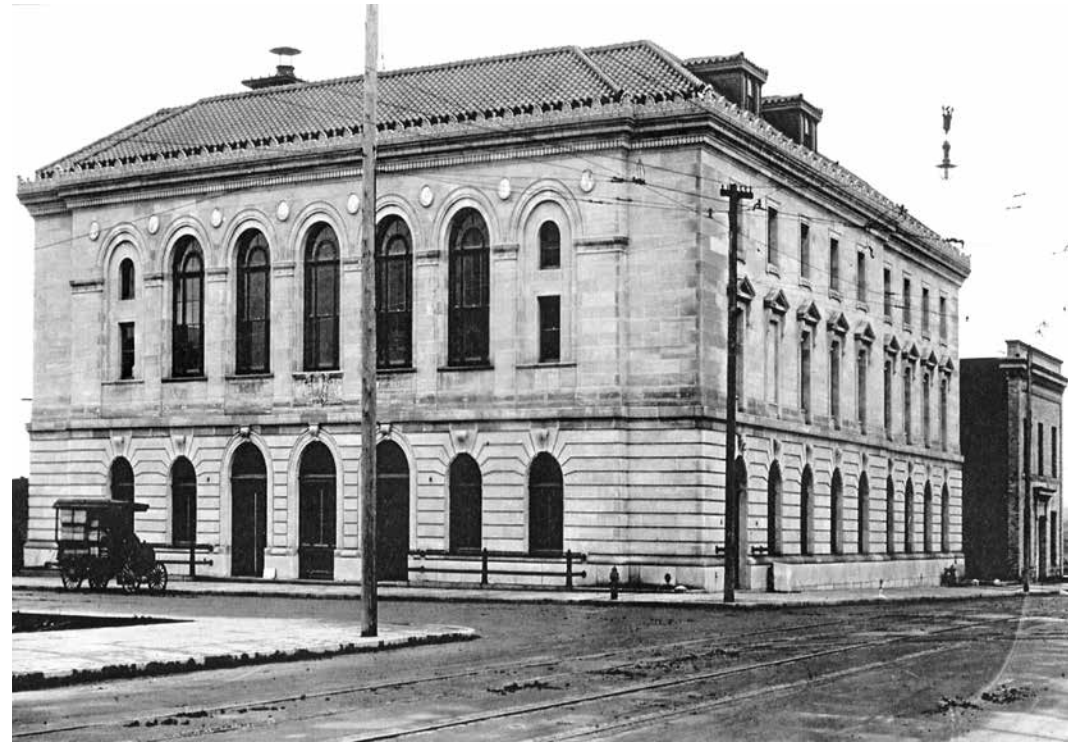
Architect: James Knox Taylor

National Register Listed

The Bellingham Federal Building was designed for the U.S. Post Office with the needs of the elderly and handicapped patrons in mind. The street-level entrance was uncommon at the time (most US Post Offices had their entrance at the top of a flight of steps), and was the idea of Bellingham postmaster Hugh Eldridge. The building was designed in the Beaux Arts style, popular for public and institutional buildings around the turn of the 20th century. The style used classical Greek and Roman forms and features such as massive plans, heavy masonry and elaborate detailing. Like the Clover Block's "H" plan, the Federal Building was designed as an "O" plan, which created an interior light well.

Photo at right, Federal Building in 1913.

Photo below shows the Christmas rush at the post office in the lobby of the Federal Building, Jack Carver, 1947.





#35 Bellingham Public Market

1400 Cornwall Avenue

Built 1916

Architect: Not known

Today's Rite Aid building was originally built as the Bellingham Public Market. Downtown Bellingham had many public markets, permanent buildings where vendors sold food and specialty items, operating something like the farmers' markets of today. The Bellingham Public Market had 23 vendors including a grocery, meat and fish market, a restaurant and soda fountain, a watchmaker, florist, and wood and coal dealers. The building had lift-up overhead bay doors, freight delivery in the alley and a streetcar stop on the corner for customers. The Bellingham Public Market closed in 1957, then housed a Pay 'n Save before becoming Rite Aid.

Photo above of the Bellingham Public Market in 1918.

Photo at right shows the building in 2014.



#36 Benevolent Protective Order of Elks Building

1412 Cornwall Avenue
Built 1912
Architect: William Cox
National Register Listed

This handsome buff-colored brick building was originally a clubhouse for the "Benevolent Protective Order of Elks" fraternal society. For many years the Elks Club was one of Bellingham's most prestigious social organizations, and had many political and civic leaders as members. The building offered members use of card rooms, pool tables, and a three-lane bowling alley. The first floor had offices and reading rooms, the second floor a large ballroom. The Elks Club was a place to gather and socialize, but the Elks were also a service organization and contributed to many charitable, patriotic, and civic causes, as well as supporting youth activities.

Photo by J.W. Sandison, 1915.



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Some remnants of Downtown's original landscape still remain, marked by houses sited on hills above the street, alleys that climb 20' above street level, and urban "fossils" (irregular rock impressions jutting out of otherwise smooth concrete walls).

#37 Urbanizing Downtown's Natural Landscape

Originally a collection of hills and rocky outcrops, the downtown landscape has been leveled over time to create more amenable building sites that allow storefronts to open directly onto the sidewalk at street level. Some remnants of the original landscape still remain, however, marked by houses sited on hills above the street, alleys that climb 20' above street level, and urban "fossils" (irregular impressions on otherwise smooth concrete walls). Look down the alley behind the Mt. Baker Theater to see one of the few remaining rocky outcrops of downtown's natural landscape.

Photo of the Commercial Street re-grade, 1909.

#38 Public Comfort Station

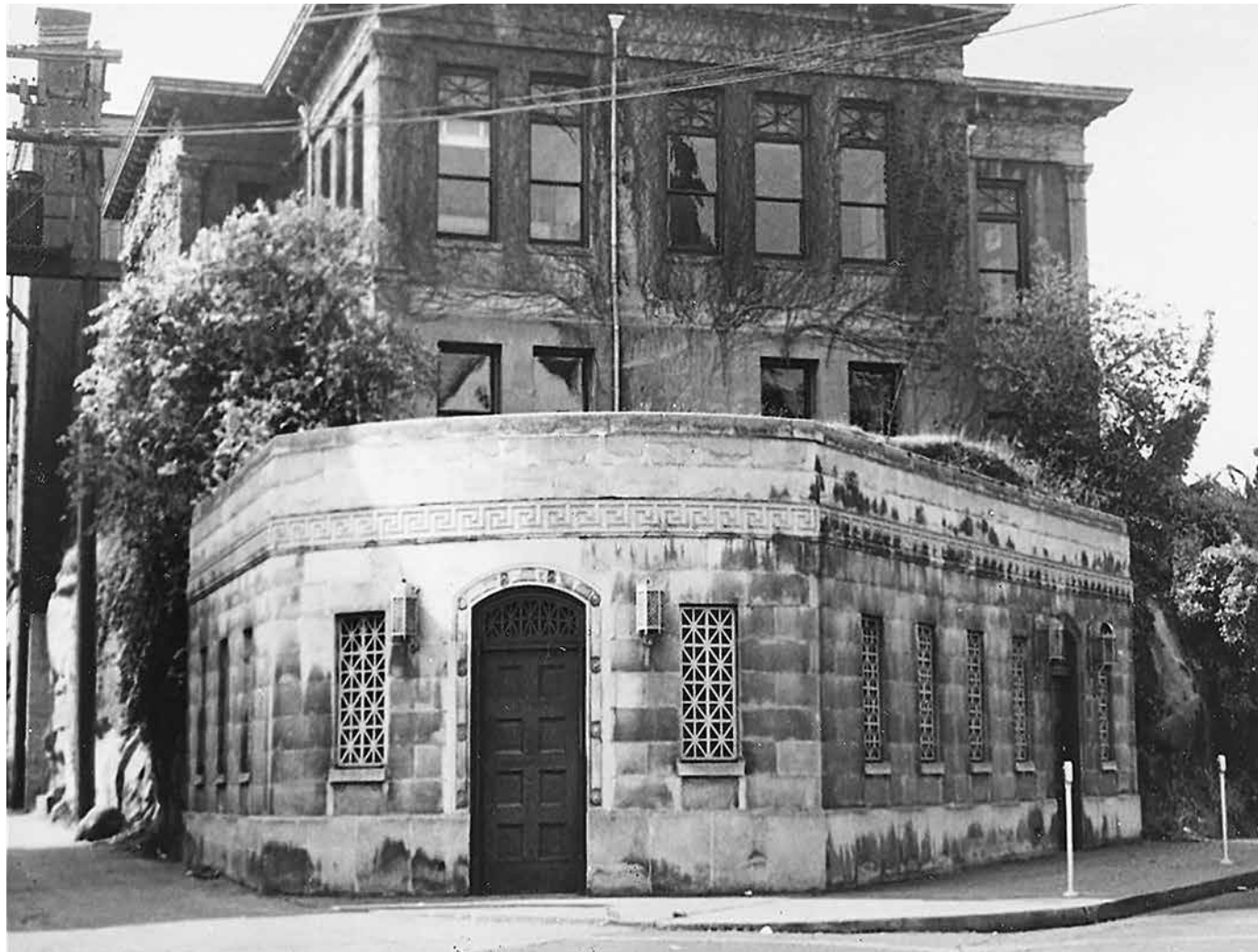
109 W. Champion Street

Built 1928

Architect: F. Stanley Piper

This small, irregularly shaped building was designed as a public restroom to accommodate visitors to the Tulip Festival, which had reached its peak of popularity in the late 1920s. The exotic Greek Key frieze at the building's cornice seems unexpected for a restroom and surely would have impressed festival visitors. The Comfort Station was built up to the bluff upon which the Carnegie Public Library stood, accounting for the nearly triangular floor plan.

Photo of the Public Comfort Station from W. Champion Street, early 1950s. The building in the background is the Carnegie Library.



#39 Carnegie Library

**109 W. Champion Street
(demolished 1953,
currently a parking lot)**

Built 1908

Architect: Alfred Lee

In 1903 Bellingham's first Carnegie library was built on 12th Street in Fairhaven. In 1906, Bellingham became one of only two cities in the country to win a second grant to build a Carnegie library in newly consolidated Bellingham's downtown. Patrons had to climb 45 steep steps to reach the front door of the building, which sat high upon a rocky hill. The stairs proved to be a hindrance for the library, and almost immediately after it was built, library boosters began looking for a new central library site. It was 1951 before they found a site, at 210 Central Ave. In 1953, the downtown Carnegie library was demolished and the hill was excavated to street grade. Today the site is a parking lot.

Photo of the Carnegie Library in 1910.





Triangular buildings are called “flatiron” because their shape resembles an iron used to press clothes.

#40 Whatcom meets Sehome

An iron bolt, dating back to the surveys made in 1858 of Sehome and Whatcom, was driven into solid rock at the intersection of W. Champion and Holly Streets. A granite sculpture marks the spot today. The boundary between the early towns of Whatcom and Sehome is evident in this section of downtown from the numerous flatiron buildings and triangular lots along W. Champion. Triangular buildings are called “flatiron” because their shape resembles an iron used to press clothes. In 1889 a bridge was built over the Whatcom Creek estuary (today's Holly Street Bridge), linking the towns of Sehome and Whatcom. This connection led to the unification of the two towns in 1891 as New Whatcom.

Aerial photo taken from a hot-air balloon by J.W. Sandison, July 1912.

#41 L.C. Countryman Building

1316 Bay Street

Built 1904

Architect: 1924 renovation by T.F. Doan

Today's Pickford Theatre was originally built as a discount, or "racket" store by L.C. Countryman in 1904. The term "racket" comes from the noise made by peddlers' carts by the banging of pots and pans attached to the carts, and was used for these types of stores at the time. The business was originally located at the corner of Holly and C Streets, but in 1904 with the consolidation of the City of Bellingham, Countryman moved his store to the desirable up-and-coming Bay Street location. In 1924 the building was updated to its current appearance in the popular Spanish Colonial Revival style, with glazed terra cotta tile work on the ground floor and stucco on the upper story.

Photo of the L.C. Countryman Building in 1905, prior to its 1924 remodel.



The term "racket" comes from the noise made by peddlers' carts by the banging of pots and pans attached to the carts, and was used for these types of stores at the time.



#42 Bellingham Bay Furniture Company (Flatiron) Building

1313 Bay Street

Built 1907

Architect: Frank C. Burns

National Register Listed

The Flatiron Building was built for the Bellingham Bay Furniture Company as its warehouse and was one of the first commercial buildings in the Pacific Northwest to be constructed entirely of reinforced concrete. Concrete was a practical solution for the furniture retailer, who faced the ever present danger of loss by fire. Ironically, the Bellingham Bay Furniture Building was swept by a major fire on April 28, 1924, but the structure's integrity survived and the building was rebuilt around the basic concrete structure. Known as Bellingham's first skyscraper, the Flatiron Building served as the city's tallest building until 1926.

Photo taken at the intersection of Holly, Bay, and Prospect Streets in 1913.

The Flatiron Building is at photo left.

#43 Barlow Building

211 W. Holly Street

Built 1892

Architect: F. Stanley Piper

Originally built for Phillip Baum's Grocery store, over the decades this building also housed the Crown Bar and Cliff Barlow's Leather Goods specialty store. In 1925 the building façade was remodeled in the Spanish Mission style. In the 1950s the store's name was changed to Barlow's Luggage and saddles, suitcases, and soles for shoes were sold here. Barlow operated his store for 40 years, closing it in 1959. The building subsequently served as a hardware store, an appliance store, and the Bellingham Beauty School. After the beauty school moved out in 2003, the new owner removed a "modern" metal façade that had been added in the 1960s, exposing the 1925 brickwork.

Photo by J.W. Macy, 1925.





British-born architect F. Stanley Piper designed numerous Bellingham buildings, both commercial and residential, many in the Tudor and Gothic revival styles.

#44 Bay Street Public Market

301 W. Holly Street

Built 1926

Architect: F. Stanley Piper

This Tudor Revival style half-timbered building with gabled dormers was described as an "Old English" design when it was first constructed as the Bay Street Market. Its British-born architect, F. Stanley Piper, designed many other Bellingham buildings, both commercial and residential, in the Tudor and Gothic revival styles. To attract customers, the building had twin entrances on W. Holly and Bay Streets and was conveniently located on the trolley line, but also provided parking spaces for customers with automobiles. The public market later became a Sears store in 1928, until 1949 when Sears moved to a new building on Cornwall Avenue.

Photo by J.W. Sandison, circa 1926.



#45 Downtown Bellingham Today

Downtown continues to change, and after more than a century remains a vibrant retail center for Bellingham. Many buildings seen in historic photos were demolished during the “urban renewal” of the 1960s, but many that remain have been restored and adapted to new uses. Streetscapes have also been improved over time with trees, landscaping, public art, and plazas such as the one at the intersection of Holly, Bay, and Prospect Streets (shown at left). Formerly a “slip lane” designed to keep cars moving through the intersection, the plaza is now a “place” where people gather and enjoy the dynamic energy of the Downtown Arts District.

Photo by Steven Berry, 2009.

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Cover photo: View from the roof of the Herald Building looking northwest, May 24, 1932.

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