

HISTORY

SCHMITZ PRESERVE was acquired for the purpose of preserving forever a reminder of the magnificent "cathedral" of forest in and through which the pioneer founders of Seattle established a new civilization on Puget Sound. However, the settlers had greater regard for the wealth in logging presented by the "cathedral" - because there was so much of it and also a condition of the Oregon Territory Donation Land Claim Act was "to cultivate and occupy the land" (320 acres per person) - so the first industry was Yesler's sawmill. Somehow this park ravine was spared from all but minor logging. Although Schmitz, donor of the major portion of the park, did not come to Seattle until 1887, he must have been in time to stake his Claim to this area and preserve this portion of the fast-disappearing "cathedral" from the hungry sawmills.

One of FERDINAND SCHMITZ' favorite poets was H. W. Longfellow (1807-1882) for it was upon his suggestion the Hiawatha PF was named; he also envisioned a "Longfellow Park"; and the major stream in West Seattle was named Longfellow Creek, either by him and/or a pioneer logger in the area, John E. Longfellow and Co. (1890 City Directory). Born in Germany in 1861, Schmitz migrated to Seattle in 1887 and became a banker, a partner in Hamm-Schmitz (realty) Co., and the Rathskellar Co., and interested himself in civic affairs, including the Park Commission from 1908 to 1914. He married his German sweetheart, Emma Althoff, and they built their home on the forested hillside facing Puget Sound which they named "Sans Souci" (French: "without worry"). Their homesite was acquired through gift and purchase and named in honor of Mrs. Emma Schmitz. Their children: Dr. Henry was president of the University of Washington (1952-1958), active in the forestry profession, Arboretum Foundation, and Salvation Army; Dietrich, a prominent banker from 1918 to 1968, School Board for 31 years, and a director of The Boeing Co. during its years of greatest growth.

Upon annexation of West Seattle in 1907, the development of recreation areas began immediately in the Alki district. The Olmsted Bros. comprehensive plan recommended the acquisition of the Schmitz "tract" plus the adjacent slope to the west, down to the sandy meadow. In 1909 the Olmsteds conceptualized a pergola and shelterhouse at the terminus of Schmitz Boulevard in the park; it was detailed for construction by architect Louis Baeder. The park became the quiet picnic haven, complementing the activities provided by Alki Beach and Playground and the commercial Luna (Amusement) Park. The route from the beach was provided by Schmitz Boulevard with an appropriate park entrance sign at the northwest corner of the playfield: two boulder columns spanned with a log, flanked by two "stone" flower pots on "stone" pedestals. This feature remained until 1953 - long after the boulevard had been closed in front of the school after a long community and legal hassle. The Olmsted Plan was to extend Schmitz Blvd up to Admiral Way and to continue east to Beacon Hill, thence to Lake Washington Blvd.

Correspondence indicates that a caretaker was assigned to Schmitz Park between 1915 and 1941, with some periods of full time duty. Even so, the park's animal and floral life suffered greatly from the devastation of guns, dogs and axes. By 1948, the shelter house and pergola, as well as a picnic area and stove up in the ravine, were so vandalized that they were removed shortly thereafter.

Since the only developed "entrance" to the park was from Alki Avenue via Schmitz Blvd, the community began to complain that it was difficult to find (1933); requesting such information on a sign, or else an entry from Admiral Way - especially after the new bridge was built. Funds were scarce then - even for WPA assistance - so it was 1949 before the entry was cut through the park forest and gravelled - asphalted three years later.

The 1953 request for development of a viewpoint scenic drive and development of play-

SCHMITZ PRESERVE

(over)

ground facilities adjacent to or within the park were declared by the City Planning Commission to be "disadvantageous" to the community and park - and the policy of preservation reaffirmed for the park - supplementing the similar reaffirmation of the Schmitz family in 1949.

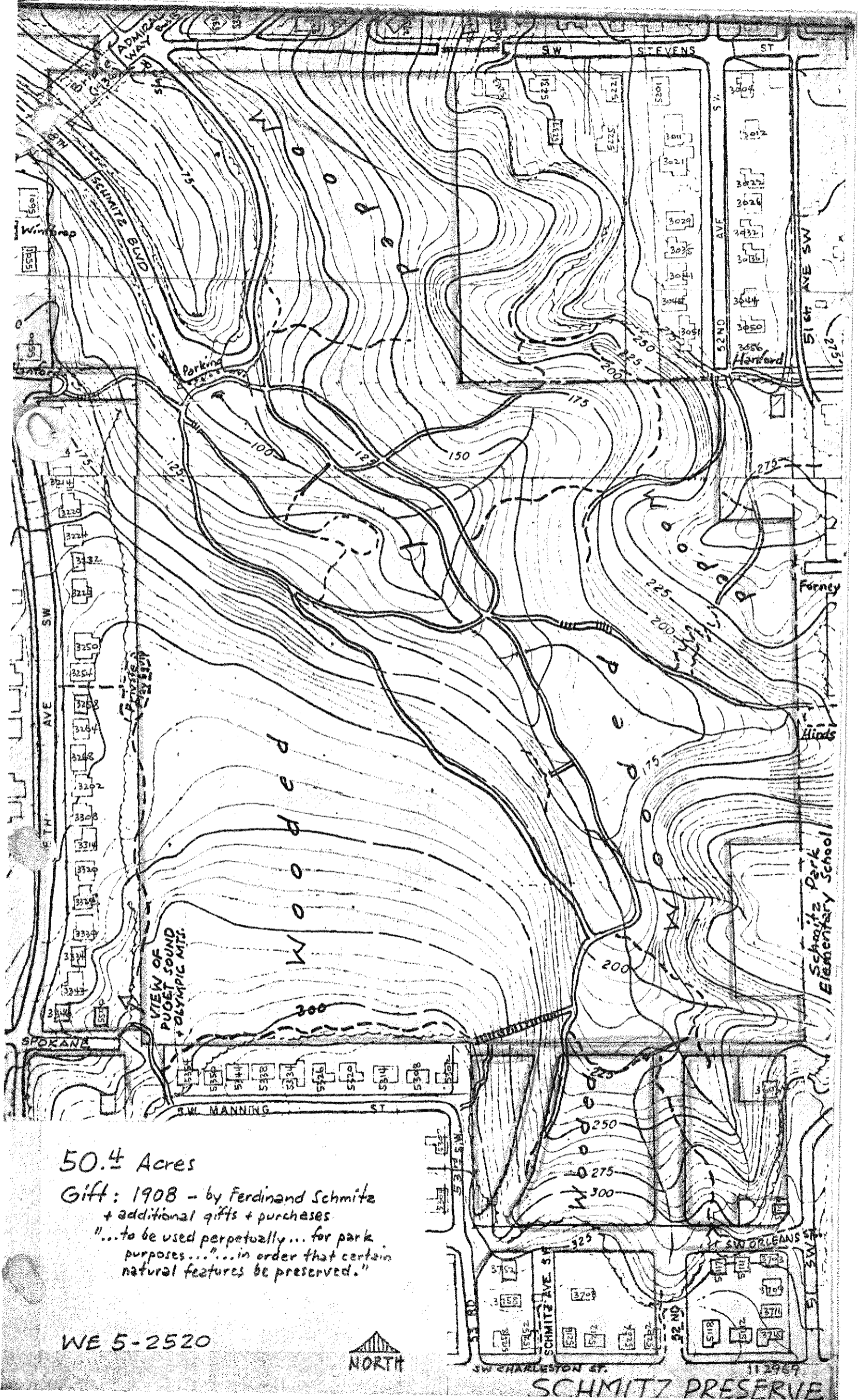
ECOLOGY

The park was given with the stipulation that it be preserved forever as a reminder of the magnificent forest in which the pioneers homesteaded. The major donor, Ferdinand Schmitz, was a pioneer civic leader; the pioneer party had landed on the nearby Alki Beach in 1851, arriving on the Schooner Exact.

The result today is a little piece of natural Humid Transitional Forest Zone in the midst of a metropolitan city. Bedrock is not exposed here. The oldest exposed sediments are of the Duwamish formation of the Pleistocene (Glacial) Age 50,000 years ago. The upper part of this formation consists mostly of peat-bearing silts indicating it was once under a marsh. Elevation differences are due to warping or tilting. The next highest formation is the Klinker Till which is variable in thickness indicating that some unevenness of land surface was present during the glacial deposit. The Lawton formation is widespread consisting of a lower clay phase and an upper sand phase - the nearby wide sandy Alki Beach is the resultant washdown deposit by Puget Sound. Evident in the highest elevations of the park is the Vashon advance gravel cut into the Lawton formation sand phase and consisting of material ranging in size from sand to boulders.

Some minor cutting of the forest did take place prior to 1908 when it became a park: several huge stumps still show the holes chopped into the sides by the loggers for placing "spring boards" on which they stood to fell the tree. (This was done to enable the loggers to cut above the harder wood of the root crown.) Trees to be found in the park include Western White Pine, Western Hemlock, Douglas Fir, Coast Redwood, Western Red Cedar (favorite of the Indians for basketry, weaving and canoes), Pacific Yew, Red Alder, Bigleaf Maple, Pacific Dogwood, Pacific Madrone, Western Blackwillow, Vine Maple; shrubs include Evergreen Huckleberry, Red Huckleberry, Salal, Swordfern, Thimbleberry, Devil's Club, Oregon Grape, Rhododendron, Skunk Cabbage. Birds observed include Bewick's Wren, Winter Wren, Common Crow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Pileated Woodpecker, Stellar's Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Song Sparrow, Varied Thrush, Rufous-sided Towhee, Red-shafted Flicker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Robin, Brown Creeper; raccoons and squirrels manage to survive the onslaught of urban life, and logs and duff near the stream edges undoubtedly support amphibians.

Mr. Schmitz also gave property for Schmitz Boulevard which, at that time, became the only access to the park from the popular new Alki Bathing Beach. A picnic pergola was built and a trail system developed through the park, providing early-day settlers with a popular outing by ferry from Seattle or Manchester for bathing, picnicking and probably a visit to Luna Park. In 1949 the boulevard was cut off with the development of Alki Playground, and the new entry from Admiral Way was built.



50.4 Acres

Gift: 1908 - by Ferdinand Schmitz
 + additional gifts + purchases
 "...to be used perpetually... for park
 purposes..."...in order that certain
 natural features be preserved."

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 SCHMITZ PRESERVE