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## Everett -- Thumbnail History

Once called the “City of Smokestacks,” Everett has a long association with industry and labor. Its first beginnings were two Native American settlements at opposite sides of the heavily wooded region, one on the Snohomish River and the other on Gardner Bay. Platted in the 1890s and named after the son of an early investor, it soon attracted the attention of East Coast money. Over the next 100 years, Everett would be a formidable logging mill and industrial center. In 2005, Everett numbered 96,000 citizens.

### Beginnings

The Port Gardner Peninsula is a point of land bound by the Snohomish River on its east flank and northern tip and by Port Gardner Bay on the west. People have inhabited the Everett Peninsula for more than 10,000 years. In recent centuries, Hebolb, the principal village of the Snohomish tribe stood at the northwest point of the peninsula. Its location near the mouth of the Snohomish River and next to Port Gardner Bay provided both abundant food and transportation. Other villages were located across the waterways. The Snohomish fortified Hebolb with a stockade made of Western red cedar posts to guard against their local enemies, the Makah, Cowichan, Muckleshoot, and the occasional northern raider.

On June 4, 1792, George Vancouver landed on the beach south of the village and claimed the entire area for the King of England. He named the bay Port Gardner for a member of his party. He apparently did not explore the river. After this first contact with the Snohomish, the next 50 years were quiet until traders with the Hudson’s Bay Company on the Columbia River ventured through in 1824. Hudson's Bay Company records show that they explored the Snohomish River. They named it “Sinnahamis.” Its present name “Snohomish” dates from the U.S. Coastal Survey of 1854 when it was charted.

In 1853, Washington Territory was formed. That same year the first white settlers in what would become Snohomish County established a water-powered sawmill on Tulalip Bay across the water from Hebolb. When the Treaty of 1855 created a reservation there for the Snohomish and other regional Indians, the settlers abandoned the operation and turned it over to the tribes. Gradually groups of white men from Port Gamble, Port Ludlow, Utsaladdy, and other Puget Sound points began to show up on the heavily forested peninsula to cut its giant timbers. They set up small logging camps in places reserved for homesteads.

During the Indian wars that erupted in King and Pierce counties after the treaty signings, the Snohomish area remained peaceful. Enterprising men making plans for a military road between Fort Bellingham and Fort Steilacoom in 1859 stimulated the exploration of the Snohomish River and its valleys. A ferry was planned at the spot where the road would cross the river. When Congress stopped funding the project, some of the young men working on the military road stayed there anyway. E. C. Ferguson claimed his own place and named it Snohomish City (1859). He was first to describe the area near present day Everett as full of trees:

“with their long strings of moss hanging from branches, which nearly shut out the sunlight ... At the time the opening at the head of Steamboat Slough was not more than fifty feet wide” (Dilgard and Riddle).

### First Settlers on the Peninsula

Dennis Brigham was the first permanent settler in the area that would become Everett. A carpenter from Worcester, Massachusetts, he came in 1861 the same year Snohomish County was organized. He built a cabin

on 160 acres along Port Gardner Bay and lived alone. Cut off from his nearest neighbors by the deep forests, he still had enough contact to gain the name of “Dirty Plate Face.”

In 1863, the area saw increased settlement. Erskine D. Kromer, telegraph operator and lineman for the World Telegraph, took a claim just south of Brigham. When the venture ended he settled down with a Coast Salish wife and raised a family. Leander Bagley and H. A. Taylor opened the first store in the area on the point next to Helbo. Indians pushed out by homesteaders and loggers came by to trade. The store would change ownership several times.

Also in 1863, on the snag-filled Snohomish River, E. D. Smith set up a logging camp at an angled bend in the river. Here the water was deep and an undercutting current kept his log booms against the bank. At the time there were no mills in Snohomish County. Logs were rafted down river and sent to mills around the sound. Everett’s future was foreshadowed when, during that same year, Jacob and David Livingston set up the first steam sawmill in the county near present day Harbor View Park on the bayside. It was a short-lived venture.

Settlement continued, although one early passerby in 1865 wrote that he saw nothing but woods. The settlers were there. Ezra Hatch claimed land in what would become downtown Everett and George Sines claimed land on the riverside. Together with Kromer, they would hold the most valuable holdings in the future city. There were others: Benjamin Young, George and Perrin Preston, J. L. Clark, and William Shears. They lived in simple log cabins scattered around in the woods, but when Bagley sold his share of the store to J. D. Tullis with the right to lease a portion back for a home and shipyard, Everett industry arrived. In 1886 he built the small sloop *Rebecca* which he sailed throughout the area. Eventually, the Prestons bought out all the shares to the store. George and Perrin Preston with his Snohomish wife Sye-Dah-bo-Deitz or Peggy would give the name Preston Point to the ancient Snohomish center.

Between the 1870 and 1880 census the white population in Snohomish County increased from 400 to 1,387, of which a minimal amount was found on the peninsula. Neil Spithill and his Snohomish wife Anastasia, the daughter of Chief Bonaparte, settled on the river where the peninsula jutted into it like a left-hand thumb. In 1872, Jacob Livingston filed the first townsite (“Western New York”) on Port Gardner Bay not far from his failed sawmill. John Davis settled at Preston Point where 50 acres were diked, and between the Snohomish River and the sloughs crops of oats, hay, hops, wheat, barley potatoes, and fruit began to appear. E. D. Smith continued to expand his logging businesses, employing 150 men. The area’s first postmaster, Smith platted the town of Lowell in 1872. In 1883, the U.S. government began snag-removal and cleared other impediments on the river. With the coming of mechanized lumber and cedar shingle production, several mills located in the area. Smith began construction on his own mill in 1889 the same year Washington became a state.

## Booms and Busts

Statehood brought celebration and speculation. Connection to the area via the Seattle and Montana Railway was close at hand, but when James J. Hill announced that his Great Northern Railway would come over the Cascades to Puget Sound, many people thought that meant the railroad would come to the peninsula. There was money to be made.

First came the Rucker Brothers, Wyatt and Bethel and their mother. They bought the old Dennis Brigham homestead property on the bayside in 1890. They built a house and planned to start the townsite of “Port Gardner.” Joining them was William Swalwell and his brother Wellington. The Swalwells picked up a large section of the Spithill’s claim on the river covered with a growth of “timber so dense that trees on all sides touched the little cabin” (Roth). Frank Friday, who bought the old Kramer homestead from Kramer’s widow added to the real estate mix. This juxtaposition of bayside to riverside settlements set the layout of the future city streets, though the Swalwell’s Landing, as it became known, was separated from the bay by “a mile of second-growth timber, impassable underbrush and a marshy area near the center of the peninsula” (Dilgard and Riddle). Things began to heat up when Tacoma lumberman and land speculator Henry Hewitt Jr.

(1840-1918) arrived in the spring of 1890 with \$400,000 of his own money, dreaming of a great industrial city.

After learning that one of John D. Rockefeller's associates, Charles L. Colby (1839-1896), was looking for a site for the American Steel Barge Company of which he was president, Hewitt met with him. He convinced him that the peninsula with its river and bay access offered the perfect location for that and other industrial concerns. Impressed, Colby talked it up with friends and relatives. Once they were on board, Hewitt immediately approached the Ruckers, Friday, and Salwell and enticed them to join him. They transferred half of their holdings, nearly 800 acres, to the syndicate backed with the East Coast money of Rockefeller, Colby, and Colgate Hoyt, a director of the Great Northern Railroad. Hewitt also bargained with E. D. Smith for a paper mill.

In November 1890, the group incorporated the Everett Land Company. They made Hewitt president. For a time they met in offices at E. D. Smith's boarding house in Lowell. By spring of 1891, the peninsula began to hum as land was cleared for a nail factory, the barge works, a paper mill, and smelter. Five hundred men graded, surveyed, and platted the townsite. Hewitt Avenue, one and half mile long and 100 feet wide, was cut from bay side to riverside. The townsite of stumps became Everett, after the son of Charles Colby.

Over the months, the city of Everett saw astonishing growth. Before the Everett Land Company lots went on sale, Swalwell jumped the gun and began selling his own lots on banks of the Snohomish River in September 1891. He built a large dock for the sternwheel steamer traffic. Dubbed the "cradle of Everett," Swalwell's Landing boomed at the riverside foot of Hewitt, at intersection of Chestnut and Pacific. The Pacific/Chestnut community was a wild west town with gambling and prostitution along with the offices of Brown Engineering Company in charge of platting the townsite, "Workingman's Grocery," a small shoe store, another grocery store, a tent hotel, meat market, and barber shop. The streets were muck choked, its sidewalks made of thrown down planks. Farther south at Lowell, Smith built a dock for his new paper mill already in production.

On the bayside, the Everett Land Company built a long wharf at 14th Street on which a sawmill was built at the end. They also built an immense warehouse of some 400 feet and a fancy brick hotel, the Monte Cristo, three stories high. By the time the company started selling their residential and commercial property in late 1891, the building frenzy had attracted the nation. "An Army of Men at Work On a Mammoth Establishment," the headline in the newly established *Port Gardner News* boasted in September 1891.

By the spring of 1892, Everett resembled a city albeit with stumps. There were frame homes, schools, churches (land provided by the Everett Land Company), and theaters as well as 5,600 citizens, a third of them foreign born (mostly English and Scandinavian) enjoying streetcar service, electricity, streetlights, and telephones. The Everett Land Company won a suit to own the waterfront. The promise of riches in the mines in the Cascades spurred the building of the Everett-Monte Cristo railroad from there to a smelter on the peninsula.

In April 1893, Everett incorporated by election. Then came trouble. In May, the Silver Panic caused a national depression that slammed into Everett. Factories closed down. Banks failed. Wages dropped 60 percent. The railroads either failed or faltered. People left in droves. By 1895, Rockefeller started to withdraw his investments. Hewitt was dismissed from the Everett Land Company. Colby took over. The lack of return on fees nearly bankrupted the city government. The streetlights were turned off. Against this background the town of Snohomish fought the struggling city of Everett over which would be the county seat. Everett finally took the claim away in 1897.

## **A Second Wind**

Everett began to recover in 1899 after Rockefeller's Everett Land Company transferred its holdings to James J. Hill's Everett Improvement Company. The railroad magnate saw benefits for his Great Northern Railroad.

He sent 42-year-old John McChesney as his representative. Industrial growth improved. Work continued on dredging the river and the bay. Frederick Weyerhaeuser, neighbor of Hill in St. Paul, Minnesota, came to Everett and founded the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company. He built the world's largest lumber mill which produced 70 million feet by 1912. David A. Clough and Harry Ramwell formed the American Tugboat Company.

By 1903, the Polk Everett City Directory boasted of 10 sawmills, 12 shingle mills, a paper mill, flouring mill, foundries and machine shops, planing mills, a smelter, an arsenic plant, a refinery, "creosoting" works, a brewer, a sash and door plant, an ice and cold storage plant, and a creamery. Industry employed more than 2,835 men. Telephone subscriptions went from 493 in 1901 to 980 with 23 women employees and eight linemen.

Secret societies as wide ranging as the Elks and the Ancient Order of United Workmen and the Catholic Order of Foresters and the Improved Order of Red Men "meeting at next great camp in the Hunting Grounds of Aberdeen" (Polk) flourished. Times were good.

In 1907, Everett passed the First Class City Charter and boomed after the San Francisco earthquake and fire brought huge orders for Northwest lumber. The city's own big fire in 1909 destroyed parts of the city, but did not deter future growth. Three years later its population reached three times its size in 1900 -- 25,000. Ninety-five manufacturing plants, "including 11 lumber mills, 16 shingle mills and 17 mills producing both" (Shoreline Historical Survey,) dominated the area.

Unions also dominated the city, making it one of the most unionized in the country. There were 25 unions in all. Of these, the International Shingle Weavers Union of the American Federation of Labor was the strongest. The work they did at shingle mills was dangerous. The bolter used a circular saw with a blade that stood 50 inches in diameter and had three-inch teeth. A man pushed the log toward it at waist height with his knee and hands. Men fell or were pulled into it. Of the 224 people who died in Everett in 1909, 35 were killed in the mills -- almost one a week. Labor unrest grew and strikes threatened.

In 1916, the shingle weaver's strike culminated in a bloody confrontation at the city dock when two boatloads of Industrial Workers of the World members sailed up from Seattle to demonstrate support of striking shingle mill workers and free speech. Five workers on the steamer *Verona* and two deputies on the dock were killed. Some 30 others were wounded. The strike ended not long after. This became known as the Everett Massacre.

During World War I, Everett benefited from the demand for lumber, but for the rest of the twentieth century the city saw many down times as it went through a national depression in 1920, the Great Depression, and problems with continual silting in the river channels.

Always a lumber and industrial town, it began to diversify. A Works Progress Administration project in 1936 created Paine Field on 640 acres of land owned by Merrill Ring Logging and the Pope and Talbot Company eight miles southwest of the city. The airfield established aviation and eventually a military presence in the area. The county matched federal dollars.

### **Military Bases**

During World War II the field became a military base. Its name was changed to Paine Field in honor of Lt. Topliff Olin Paine, pioneer aviator from Everett killed in a 1922 Air Mail Service crash. An Army Air Corps unit moved in and stayed for five years. Runways were improved and fueling capabilities added for certain aircraft types. Alaska Airlines started a presence. The military returned during the Korean War (1950-1953) taking over the control tower, but withdrew in 1968. This opened the way for Boeing Corporation. Already owners of acreage north of the airfield, Boeing built the world's largest building by volume (472 million cubic feet) for their radically new 747 jetliner.

Construction on Naval Station Everett began in November 1987. In January 1994, Navy personnel moved into the completed Fleet Support and Administration buildings and officially began operations. Currently, Everett is home to three frigates, one nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, one destroyer, and a Coast Guard buoy tender. It is the United States Navy's most modern base.

In 2005, the city of Everett enjoyed growth and revitalization. During the past 20 years, the downtown area has been upgraded and some of the historic structures have been restored. Restaurants, shops, and parks line the bayside of the city. Industrial parks are planned for riverside. A community college and homes stand around Preston Point. Dennis Brigham and E. D. Smith would both be amazed. Henry Hewitt would say that his dream has gone on.

## Sources:

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Hewitt Avenue looking east, Everett

*Postcard Courtesy Everett Public Library*



Swallow's Landing, site of newly platted Everett, 1891

*Photo by Frank La Roche, Courtesy Everett Public Library (Image No. 1056)*



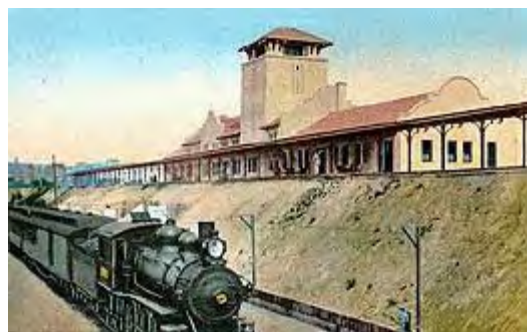
Birdseye view of the Everett Peninsula, ca. 1893

*Courtesy City of Smokestacks*



William Weahlub of the Tulalip Reservation smoking salmon and roe on the beach, 1906

*Photo by Norman Edson, Courtesy UW Special Collections*



Great Northern Railway Depot, Everett, 1920s

*Postcard*



Clark-Nickerson Lumber Mill, Everett, 1900s

*Postcard*



Downtown Everett, 1920s

*Postcard*



Hewitt Avenue and Commerce Block, Everett, 1914



Hewitt Avenue looking east, Everett, 1920s

*Postcard*



Looking west along Hewitt Avenue across Wetmore, Everett, 1920s

*Photo by J. A. Juleen, Courtesy Everett Public Library (Neg. Juleen842)*





Aerial view of Everett, 1950s

*Postcard*



Naval Station Everett, 2004

*Courtesy U.S. Navy*



Everett, September 28, 2005

*HistoryLink.org Photo by Priscilla Long*



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