

## CAPITOL HILL

A New Seattle Neighborhood, Courtesy of J. A. Moore

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On July 10, 1900, J. A. Moore, a real estate developer, acquired one of Seattle's last remaining near-in districts. The purchase of the property that came to be called Capitol Hill was "one of the largest deals in unimproved residence property ever made in the city of Seattle, when the 'Woodworth tract,' a quarter section of land adjoining the city park [Volunteer Park] passed through two ownerships, finally being taken over by the Moore Investment Co., which paid for it the sum of \$225,000," reported the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

The transaction began, said a news bulletin from San Francisco to the *P-I*, when the Woodworth estate sold Hugh C. Wallace of Tacoma "160 acres of land adjoining the residence portion of Seattle" for the sum of \$190,000. The dispatch noted that "it is not definitely stated what the purchaser purposes to do with it, but it is reported that the land will be improved by the expenditure of a large amount of money."

Asked to verify that account by the *P-I*'s Tacoma correspondent and to explain why he decided to make such a large purchase, Wallace replied that "he believed real estate values would enhance very rapidly. Agencies are at work upon every side for the upbuilding of Seattle, nothing can hold her back."

It was a most erudite answer. Later that same day Wallace came to Seattle and sold his property to the Moore Investment Company for \$225,000, a profit of \$35,000 in one afternoon. "Such a large sale of unplatted residence property is regarded as a sure indication of the great faith capital has in the future of the city," reported the *Seattle Daily Times*. Within a year and a half, people considered that property, which had been covered with underbrush, one of the best residential districts in the city. To expand his development, Moore purchased an additional 40-acre tract adjoining the original 160.

How did Selim Woodworth, neither an early Seattle pioneer nor a resident of Washington, obtain and hold onto such valuable land for nearly half a century? And who was J. A. Moore, whose investment company had sufficient capital to purchase and develop the property?

The paper trail generated to answer these questions leads back to 1847 when, to encourage enlistment in the Mexican War, the United States issued bounty land warrants that could be used "to enter land anywhere in the public domain" rather than limiting entry to specific military districts. To retroactively compensate surviving veterans who had served since the Revolutionary War, Congress extended the warrants in 1850, 1852, and 1855. Selim E. Woodworth, who served as midshipman on the ship *Warren* during the Mexican War, became a beneficiary of the Military Bounty Land Act of March 3, 1855. Although he received 160 acres of

land in King County for his service in the war, Commodore Woodworth and his family settled in San Francisco.

Delays in certifying that the location mentioned in Warrant 38,010 was correct and "unincumbered in any manner," and untangling the legalities of his will, which stated his children could not receive their share until each "arrive of lawful age," kept the property off the market until 1900. Though neither Selim Woodworth nor his heirs ever lived in Washington, the property that became Capitol Hill remained in Woodworth's family for almost 50 years.

An astute businessman, James A. Moore or "J. A.," as he was affectionately called, came to Seattle in 1886 or 1887. Imbued with a vision that Seattle would grow to be a great city, Moore, who had a missionary's faith and a promoter's punch, launched a lucrative real estate business, the Moore Investment Company, in 1897. As the son of a prosperous builder and ship owner in Nova Scotia, Moore had the money and contacts to purchase large tracts of undeveloped Seattle land. He aided, abetted, and financed so many commercial and residential areas of Seattle that many labeled the Moore Investment Company the leading real estate firm in the city.

When real estate deals became too large to handle locally, he called upon his eastern contacts for additional financing. On December 23, 1899, *The Argus*, a Seattle newspaper, wrote, "The Moore Investment Company is the leader in letting the business and financial centers of the East know what we have." His firm brought large sums of money to Seattle for building substantial business blocks, beautiful residences, and adding generally to the prosperity of the city. In turn, Moore lent the money to potential buyers. For example, in 1899 when he offered homes for sale on 12th, 13th, and 14th Avenues in an area known as the Western Slope of Renton Hill, Moore advertised: "We offer lots in this tract...on very easy terms. We will loan purchasers sufficient money to build with at 7 per cent."

Prior to owning the Capitol Hill property, Moore had developed residential areas in Seattle neighborhoods such as Latona, Brooklyn, Renton Hills, and University Heights. His firm built the seven-story Lincoln Apartments, described as "the first and finest apartment house west of Chicago," and the Arcade Building in downtown Seattle. And with two partners he organized the Lake Union Transportation Company. An active, valued member of Plymouth Congregational Church and a contributor to good causes, Moore played a valuable role in Seattle's development.

Moore and his wife, Eugenia G. Jones, left Seattle around 1914 and settled in San Francisco. By this time Moore had investments in other parts of the country. Although Seattle businessmen tried to persuade him to return, ill health kept him in warmer climates. A Florida investment in a 200-home subdivision hit by a hurricane bankrupted him. He died in the Palace Hotel on May 21, 1929. Among his papers was this note: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood. Make big plans; aim high and hope and work." Undoubtedly, Moore practiced what he believed.

In news dispatches announcing Moore's purchase, the property was referred to as the Woodworth Tract. Prior to 1901, the name Capitol Hill did not appear in Seattle newspaper articles reporting street car routes or the location of cemeteries and parks in that section of the city. The area had been only a blank on city maps. What made Moore choose Capitol Hill as the name for this particular residential district?

Books and articles written many years after the first residents moved into the area's stately homes suggest that Moore either named the property after an area in Denver or planned to build the state's capitol on his property. Though both answers may be correct, (his wife did live in Denver), there is strong evidence supporting the latter view. A brief review of the prolonged controversy establishing Olympia as the state capital explains why.

Contention over the seat of government began a year after Congress created Washington Territory on March 2, 1853. The earliest contestants for the capital city were Olympia, Steilacoom, Port Townsend, and Vancouver. Isaac Stevens, the territorial governor, chose Olympia, but this was only a temporary solution subject to a ratifying vote by the territory's voters. Two years later the territorial legislature made Olympia the permanent capital, but because of constant bickering among cities still clamoring for the capital, it did not seem prudent to construct a permanent capitol building there.

Many history books state that Arthur Denny wanted the capitol in Seattle. That may have been the case, but in truth, Seattle had never been seriously considered. In fact, Arthur Denny had been one to speak out first for Olympia (1855) and then for Vancouver, on the promise that Seattle would get an amenity like the territorial university. Denny had been persuaded by Daniel Bagley, an influential Methodist minister, that having a university was more important.

Right up until statehood in 1889, Olympia remained a questionable site for the state's capitol. Some thought the city was inaccessible for eastern Washington legislators who would incur huge travel expenses getting there. Even when Olympia won approval of the voters in 1889 and 1890, the legislature could not find the funds for a new capitol. Squabbling continued as Tacoma made one more attempt to obtain the seat of government. Not until 1901 did the legislature agree with Governor John R. Rogers and authorize money to purchase the Thurston County Courthouse and turn it into a suitable state capitol.

Though the courthouse-capitol was to be completed by 1903, complications put construction behind schedule. The legislature again had to rent quarters—an annex to the store of A. Farquhar. It was such a badly deteriorating building that legislators as well as newspaper commentators kept up a barrage of criticism and ridicule. The new capitol building (now called the Old Capitol Building), built in the monumental Romanesque architectural style, finally opened in 1905.

Taking advantage of the controversy and delay in building, Moore persuaded William H. Lewis, a King County representative, to introduce a bill in Olympia "providing for the appointment of a committee to consider the offer of a site and capitol building in Seattle." On March 4, 1901, a notice in the *Daily Bulletin*, a Seattle business journal, stated:

*Mr. J. A. Moore, acting for a few men interested in locating the capitol building in Seattle, has had a bill introduced in the legislature in Olympia which proposed to donate a site of five acres in the Capitol Hill addition, and also a \$250,000 building for the use of the legislature. Sketches of the proposed capitol have been forwarded to Olympia. Mr. Moore is warmly interested in securing the capitol for this city, and has put in much work in Olympia lately in conference with the representatives.*

A 1901 Morrison & Robinson map of the City of Seattle places the proposed State Capitol between Prospect and Helen and 19th and 21st Avenue East (using today's designations).

Asked about the bill he had introduced, Lewis explained that "the real estate man had exacted a pledge from him to present the bill, [but] I shall oppose it in committee and when it comes

before the house." He further explained that "the Seattle real estate man wanted the capitol to remain at Olympia, but in case removal to another city should be considered by the legislature, he desired that his bill receive consideration."

Did Moore seriously believe Olympia would lose the capitol when he had his bill introduced? Or did he, a skilled businessman, recognize an opportunity to legitimize and publicize the chosen name for his newly acquired property? He knew that on that very day the house had voted to purchase the Thurston County courthouse for use as the capitol, and that Tacoma and Everett had withdrawn from the contest. Furthermore, Frederick Burch, another King County legislator, stated that "he did not believe that anybody in King County, outside of this real estate man, desired the capitol removed to Seattle."

Unfortunately, Moore's reasoning and objective are lost to history. Whether his legislative push was unrealistic politics or shrewd business tactics may never be known. All we can say with certainty is that Olympia remained the state capital, the Woodworth tract did become known as Capitol Hill, and Hugh Wallace, who owned it for less than a day, had been prescient about the "Hill's" potential.

In the beginning, Capitol Hill had very definite boundaries. The 160 acres the federal government generously granted Selim Woodworth and which J. A. Moore purchased for \$225,000, are located in the North West quarter and Section 28 in Township 25 North of Range 4 East. Though Moore acquired an additional 40 acres, when he first offered lots for sale, an address on Capitol Hill in 1901 meant the homeowner lived between 11th and 20th Avenue East (using today's designation), north of Roy until Galer, excluding Volunteer Park. By 1907, when all of Capitol Hill had been platted, the boundaries extended on the east to 24th Avenue and on the north to Galer Avenue, including East Garfield between 15th and 17th.

Advertisements and feature stories in the city's newspapers quickly promoted Moore's Capitol Hill development. Typical is one that won first prize in a contest sponsored by the *Seattle Times* in August 1901 to judge where the best residence portion of the city would be located. The Reverend Edward Lincoln Smith, pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church and the winning essayist, was effusive in enumerating the merits of Capitol Hill:

*There is but one locality in all the area of Seattle where every detail of that perfect panorama is presented. From this eminence mountains, Sound and lakes all appear.... It is accessible not alone from the business section of Seattle, but from every other residential portion as well.... The new High School [Broadway] is only a few blocks away, requiring no street car service whatever.... The atmosphere is pure. There is no smoke of factories nor odors of stock yards from the water front, for the prevailing winds carry them in another direction.... Fog from the Sound reaches this altitude rarely, and then only after enveloping every other strata of the city.... The surroundings meet every requirement of good taste, parental solicitude for proper associates of children, and conditions insuring steady enhancement of values.... No other part of the city has ever been developed on a scale so gigantic or pushed with energy.*

Before he sold lots and built houses, Moore, in distances varying from three to ten blocks, graded and paved several miles of street improvements with a two-inch layer of asphalt on a foundation of five-inch concrete. Cement sidewalks five feet wide, flanked with parking strips, were separated from the street by concrete curbs. He also installed six-inch water mains and eight-inch sewer pipes and planned for street lights and telephone poles.

Claiming the absence of restrictions had ruined many localities otherwise well adapted to residential purposes, Moore imposed rules and regulations for building homes. These were: 1) no residence will be allowed at a cost of less than \$3,000 (lots ranged from \$1,200 to \$2,000); 2) no residence, nor any part of a residence, will be allowed nearer than 24 feet to the sidewalk line; and 3) no store, business blocks, nor flats will be permitted on the property.

Six months later, in an advertisement to sell 12 lots on 11th Avenue, he announced: "There are no building restrictions attached to these lots." Seemingly he did not let his beliefs stand in the way of a sale.

To further enhance his property, Moore, stretching the truth, advertised that one month after the first sale of lots the area would be serviced by six street car routes. Asked if he was pushing Capitol Hill, Moore replied, "No, I am not pushing Capitol Hill. Capitol Hill is pushing me." Within six months of his initial advertisement, 32 residences were either completed or under construction. Eastern people made about a third of the purchases, reported *The Argus* on May 3, 1902. Many purchased multiple lots. It is "one section of the city where there is no dust. The paving prevents that," wrote *The Seattle Mail and Herald*, June 28, 1902.

Moore's deep involvement in most aspects of the developing Capitol Hill, and his insistence that his investment company should deal with private contractors to set down streets and sidewalks, created many admirers. All the Seattle newspapers and many in the business community praised his projects. "The private citizen, for instance, can see no good reason why the owner of a tract of land has not the right to improve it, if he can put in the improvements at about sixty per cent of what the city would pay," reported *The Argus*. "Anyone who has had experiences with city improvements knows what they cost. Improvements are all in, and what is more they are all paid for," observed *The Seattle Mail and Herald*.

No sooner had lots been sold and homes built, than entrepreneurs started businesses, pastors and parishioners planned churches, and schools opened. Capitol Hill quickly became a Seattle neighborhood and continued to expand. It now encompasses tracts platted by others as early as 1875 and extends blocks beyond the land originally owned by Woodworth. Since at least the 1930s neighborhoods south and west, known earlier as Harvard Heights, Highland's Addition, Denny's Broadway Addition, Summit Supplemental Addition, and Renton Hill are considered part of Capitol Hill. Today even Moore would be astonished at its growth and popularity.

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