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## Seattle's Green Lake: new book reveals what you didn't know about the lake everyone knows

By: Linda Thomas , Journal Newspapers

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One minute she was complaining about not using her writing skills, the next minute she's the author of a book about Green Lake in Seattle.

There was actually a year and a half in between the chance meeting that launched the writing career of local resident Brittany Wright, and the result - a newly published book called Seattle's Green Lake. The book is a part of Arcadia Publishing's "Images of America" series.

Wright works at Epilogue Books on Ballard's Market Street. She lives in an apartment with a view of the 225-acre Green Lake, but never planned on writing a book about it.

"I was at work, complaining that I wasn't using my writing degree and that I needed a challenging project, when it just so happened that an editor for Arcadia was in the book store and heard me," Wright recalled. "She turned to me and said, 'So you're a writer. Where do you live?'"

The two were soon talking about Green Lake, which most residents know is a magnet for roller bladers, joggers, dog walkers, and bikers. And before the editor left the book store, Wright had her challenge - spend a year researching and writing a history of the lake.

### History's witnesses

Photos of Green Lake from the Museum of History and Industry and University of Washington fill the 127 pages in Wright's book. But in order to get the full picture of Green Lake's significance, Wright-who's only 26 years old and is not a Seattle native -interviewed long-time residents.

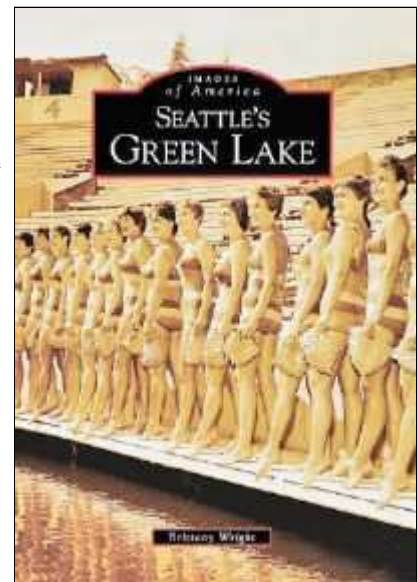
One of her sources is 91-year-old Dorothea Nordstrand, who has lived by Green Lake all her life.

Nordstrand's sons were both winners of a Huckleberry Finn look-a-like contest that was held in the 1950s along with a fishing derby. She also remembers ice skating on the lake. The ice was so thick in the winter of 1930 someone drove a car across Green Lake.

"There are so many people who have fascinating memories of Green Lake," Wright said. "Families don't sit around talking anymore and if we don't capture these stories they'll be lost."

Lost, like the Aqua Theater which was a major attraction at Green Lake. The theater, built on the south shore of Green Lake, had seven tiers of seating for more than 5,000 people. It had two 40-foot tall diving platforms on either side of a 180-foot by 67-foot pool.

The theater was the most fascinating part of Green Lake's history for Wright.



"It cost around \$247,000 and it took under 70 days to build in 1951," she said. "That's impressive."

The theater slowly faded from the Green Lake landscape. Aqua follies shows ended around 1964. One of the last acts to perform in the venue was the Grateful Dead, in 1969. In the 70s and 80s the city removed the four-story-high diving towers and seating areas.

Did you know?

In promoting the book recently, Wright found herself clearing up a common misconception about Green Lake.

"It's a huge body of water, but some people who've lived here all their lives think the city dug it out," she said.

It is not a man-made lake.

The lake has been around for about 14,000 years, give or take a few thousand. A glacier dug the basin for Green Lake, along with Lake Washington, Lake Union, Bitter Lake and Haller Lake.

Credit for Green Lake's discovery goes to a man named David Phillips, who was working on behalf of the U.S. Surveyor General in 1855. He spotted the lake which was about a mile wide and surrounded by a forest of fir trees. Phillips named it "Lake Green" because algae blooms gave the water a greenish tint.

The first pioneer to build a cabin along the lake came along in 1869. Erhart Seifried claimed 130 acres of land, and called the area "Green Lake."

Residents might think Green Lake was man-made because Seattle planners did have a hand in re-shaping the lake.

Seattle hired the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm to design city parks. The firm had strong credentials; it designed New York City's Central Park. In 1911 John Olmsted implemented a plan to lower the water level of the lake by seven feet, and create a wider shoreline around the water. That added about 100 acres of land to the perimeter of Green Lake that would be protected from development.

"There were many people like John Olmsted, Guy Phinney and others who we owe a lot to for the vision they had in planning Seattle and preserving areas like Green Lake," Wright added.

There were also a few plans for Green Lake that didn't work. A 1937 project to install a large fountain on the center of the lake to encourage water circulation was never finished, and later deconstructed because of cost overruns.

Wright hopes her history of Green Lake will remind people of how important the lake has been for the community as a gathering spot and recreation center.

She'd also like to see more people get involved in maintaining it, perhaps through the Friends of Green Lake organization.

"It isn't the cleanest lake," said Wright, who went swimming in the lake late one night so she could experience all that Green Lake had to offer. "Still, it's enchanting."

Friends of Green Lake is a non-profit organization that works to keep the lake healthy for wildlife and recreation.

**What they do:**

- \* Lobby for consistent and thoughtful lake management and stewardship.
- \* Work with lake water management scientists, engineers and professionals to research and plan long-term solutions to Green Lake's water quality problems.
- \* Encourage community involvement in issues regarding Green Lake's water quality.

- \* Involve local teachers and students in lake science and monitoring.
- \* Inform local media and the community about the lake's water quality issues.
- \* Help out: [www.friendsofgreenlake.org](http://www.friendsofgreenlake.org)

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