Excerpt from "Hooverville: A Study of a Community of Homeless Men in Seattle" by Donald Francis Roy (1935)

Chapter 3

The name is deceiving. Hooverville is not an incorporated community, proudly referring to itself with the surname of one of its distinguished founders - not a small rural village struggling to preserve its identity in an era of voracious metropolitanism. It is not a discrete community at all, but an integral part of a highly differentiated urban design within the city, and of the city, it functions as a segregated residential area of distinct physical structure, population composition, and social behavior.

The most evident characteristics of this unique "natural area" lie in its physical appearance. Five hundred tiny shanties huddle in the rain and steam in the sun on a former shipyard site to form a picture quite different from the usual American residential scene. Even the traditional street patterns of occidental civilization have been discarded. Aside from one graded road that bisects the community to form connections with a pier, there are not street or boulevards - no named and numbered avenues to aid the stranger in finding his way about. Paths weave in and out like animal trails; each resident learns to run his own maze in zigzag courses involving the least possible time, space, and energy.

...Hooverville is bounded on two sides by Puget Sound, on one side by warehouses, and on a fourth by Railroad Avenue, Seattle's main waterfront thoroughfare. At high tide the water's edge approaches within ten feet of the nearest shacks; each winter high water completely surrounds several of the dwellings, making access to them a difficult matter for several days.

...Across several blocks of urban warehouses and switching yards the engines of three transcontinental railroads whistle daily invitations to "see the country." But nearby beckons a counteracting lure, the "skidroad," where soot-lined street lights illuminate the facades of "hock shops," "greasy spoons," pool halls, cheap burlesques, "flop houses," "cribs," and Chinese gambling "joints" - and deepen by contrast the darkness of narrow alleys.

...Constructed for the most part from materials picked up along docks, railroads, alleys, and dumps, the homes of Hooverville evidence a variety of "rustling" effort, beach-combing luck, carpentry skill, and aesthetic taste on the part of those, who, like human pack rats, carried, wheeled, and dredged bits of lumber, tin, cardboard, tar paper, glass, composition roofing, canvas, and other materials of utility for shanty building to the site of Seattle's new "real estate boom."

On first impression Hooverville appears to be an odd assortment of junk painfully assembled to form a conglomerate of shacks all more or less of a uniform type; on closer inspection, however, striking differences stand out…

A high percentage of tin in its composition does not necessarily relegate a shack to a low construction rating. Although most of those which would assay high in this metal are but loosely clapsed [sic] together affairs of scraps of sheeting, with leaky roofs and draughty walls, some are neat structures of nicely fitted and tightly sealed strips. The tacking of tin over walls of lumber is very common; a few residents have carefully flattened out coal oil cans to procure this type of exterior finishing. Lathes are sometimes used as outer boarding; then nailed down neatly, they give the shack an affect of brightness…which is pleasing to the eye.

Table 1: Age Distribution of the Population of Hooverville (in five-year intervals)

Age	**Number**	**Percent**
15-19	4	0.6
20-24	33	5.2
25-29	43	6.7
30-34	46	7.2
35-39	58	9.1
40-44	85	13.3
45-49	87	13.6
50-54	95	14.9
55-59	68	16.6
60-64	55	8.6
65-69	22	3.5
70-75	6	0.9
Unknown	37	5.8
Total	**639**	**100.00**

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