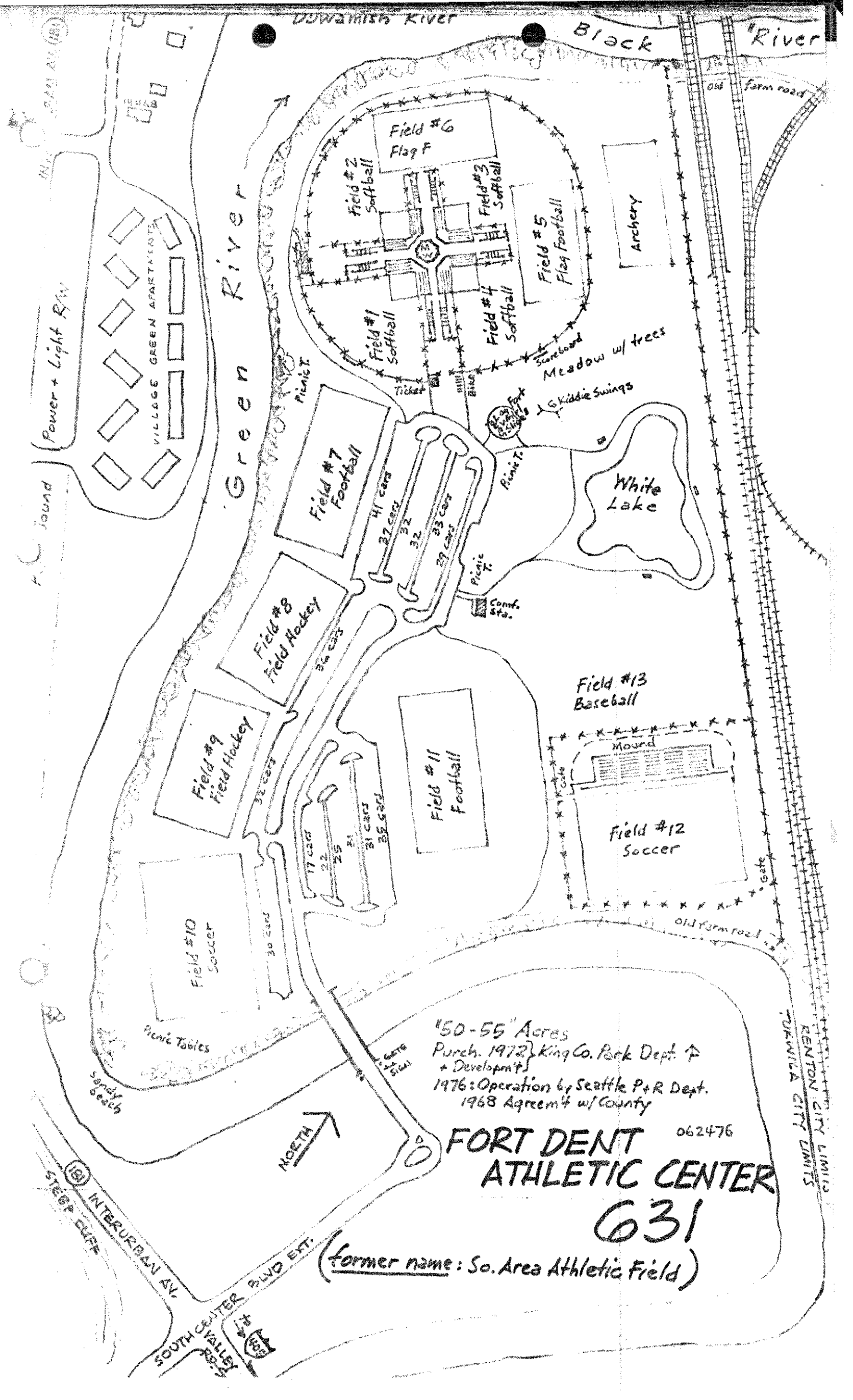


Location Map
 FT. DENT ATHLETIC CENTER



'50-55" Acres
 Purch. 1972 } King Co. Park Dept. &
 + Development
 1976: Operation by Seattle P+R Dept.
 1968 Agreement w/ County

FORT DENT 062476
ATHLETIC CENTER
631
 (former name: So. Area Athletic Field)

RENTON CITY LIMITS
 TUMWILA CITY LIMITS

HISTORY: FORT DENT ATHLETIC CENTER 5/21/76

When this land was described by the poet Longfellow as the "forest primeval" the river systems were the "highways" through the wilderness, supplemented by trails into the forests or across the mountains. Two rivers joined together at the north side of this playfield: the Black River which drained Lake Washington plus its tributary, the Cedar River, flowing from the Cascades; and the Green River from the vicinity of Mount Rainier, all joining here to form the Duwamish River flowing into Puget Sound. At this point the river is above the tidal reach of the Sound. The Indian name for this area was "Tukwila" which meant "Hazelnut".

Tribes in the Puget Sound country were the frequent victims of slavery raids by their more aggressive neighbors in Canada and Eastern Washington. Word that such a raid was planned by a mountain tribe caused the leader of the Suquamish tribe to propose a defensive strategy which was approved by the inter-tribal Council. Knowing that the marauders would come down the Green River at night, Sealth led his tribesmen to this site and during the day felled a tree across the river, just out of sight around the sharp bend in the river at the southwest corner of the playfield. Lying just inches above the water, the log effectively capsized the marauders' canoes - and Sealth's braves won an easy victory. For this feat, the Council selected Sealth (Seattle) as Chief of the allied tribes of Puget Sound (c. 1810).

Explorations of the Northwest began centuries ago by Asians crossing the Bering Straits or by boat - the probable ancestors of the Indian. European voyages began in 1543 by the Spaniard Ferrero. Those who followed him laid claim to the land in the name of their respective monarchs, which of course led to conflicting claims and power struggles to build Colonial Empires. Following establishment of the American Government after 1776, Congress sought to colonize "The West" beginning with Ohio in 1785 and financing the Lewis and Clark Expedition to the "Far West", not settled until 1846. Spain did not relinquish the Oregon Territory until 1819 and the Mexican War of 1846 was uncomfortably close to Puget Sound - by boat. So when the Oregon Territory Donation Land Claim Act was passed in 1850 and the westward trek of wagon trains and sailing ships began, the settlers were mindful of the not-too-settled Territorial conflicts. They sought to defend their claims by protecting their "highways": the river systems. There appears to have been only one all-weather road in this area until 1870. The Army built a series of block houses along the Duwamish beginning at the River delta near Pioneer Square. The junction of the Black and Green Rivers was chosen as the site for another and was named FORT DENT in honor of Capt. FREDERICK T. DENT, brother-in-law of then Captain U. S. Grant. Captain Dent supervised construction of the blockhouse in 1855; it was not manned except by volunteers and was used by both settlers and Indians. (Unrest in the area continued: the "Pig War" incident in the San Juan Islands, the post-Civil War raid by an armed Confederate vessel, The Shenandoah, the construction of the Navy Yard at Bremerton in 1891, and the establishment of Fort Lawton in 1898 to defend it and Puget Sound, and the 1898 Spanish-American War, etc.).

The soils present at this site - and in the whole valley - are mainly silts and silty fine sands, largely flood deposits, providing a rich farmland, becoming the sites of the first Land Claims by the Maples, Van Asselts, etc., in 1851. Those who settled in this vicinity chose the name "Garden City" which was used until 1905 when it was renamed Tukwila. Another Indian name in this region was "Tecumseh" who was Chief of the Black River tribe. "Riverton" was also a local name.

As the towns of Seattle, Renton, Tacoma, etc., continued to grow, so did the need for farm produce and the truck farms of the Valley multiplied and prospered. Even flower farms were successful, i.e., daffodils. The development of the farmlands caused the building of roads for the farm trucks and railroads, and even the (interurban) trolley car - alongside of which Interurban Avenue was built - hauled produce and freight to Seattle and Tacoma (from 1902-1928). The major market in Seattle was the now-famous Pike Street Farmers' Market, set up in 1906 to provide low cost, fresh product to the consumer, after a consumer "revolt" over high prices for not-so-fresh produce in stores. Many farms were worked by Chinese

and Japanese who had been imported as cheap labor to build the railroads and then expelled from the city during the anti-Chinese riots of 1886, a depression following the completion of the trans-continental railroad. Being denied the right of citizenship, the Asians could not own property until the late 1920's; then after 1941 Japanese citizens and immigrants alike lost all their holdings in both farm and city.

The towns became cities. Seattle filled the tidal flats and adjacent valley of the Duwamish, rechanneling the river as far as South 102nd and the valley began to "grow" industrial plants. With it came urban sprawl/suburbia with its supportive shopping and industrial centers, causing zoning changes with an increase in taxes. As one farmer explained: "There is only so much revenue in an acre of land, even when it's good land farmed by a good farmer." This, together with the loss of motivation to work on the land by the farmers' children and the amount of foodstuffs produced, packaged and purveyed through agricultural corporations, has led to the demise of the truck farmer. The Department of Agriculture has estimated that in the 1920's there were 300 truck farms in the county; by 1969 there were only 86. By 1969, the Riverview (Dairy) Farm on this site had been acquired by Puget Power in a landbank and was chosen for this athletic center in 1971 after the 7 proposed sites were rejected by the Seattle and King County Park Departments.

The junction point of the Black River with the Green River to form the Duwamish is still evident on the north side of the playfield. But the Black River ceased to exist after 1917, when, after a long and heated debate over its location, the Lake Washington Ship Canal opened, an event which lowered the level of Lake Washington by 9'. The Cedar River, which had been a tributary of the Black River, was turned by dredging to flow into the south end of Lake Washington to prevent a stagnation of the south end of the lake. The bed of the Black River was filled. There is no record of the fate of the salmon which sought to return via the Black River to spawning beds in the Cedar River or Lake Washington basin - if they did. Old residents claim to have seen the Indians fishing salmon from the Duwamish River. Included in the construction of the locks was a fish ladder - a feature that was improved for both fish and viewer with the development of Commodore Park in 1976. The lowering of the level of Lake Washington was permitted "to lessen the havoc caused by the flooding of the tributary river valleys - an alarming 7' crest was recorded in 1867." (Water Dept.) Flooding of the Green River occurs every year but it is seldom a major disaster. The playfield was designed to be above the level of the highest flood recorded over a period of 100 years. So - during construction of the facility, a spring flood exceeded the 100 year record! The pond is said to be the former White Lake (references in 1860 by J. A. Costello and in an 1894 deed refer to the White River, now known as the Green River; the deed notes that the White River was diverted in Auburn in 1907.)

(An interurban story: on city streets it used a trolley wire but in the country it used a third rail which enabled it to achieve speeds up to 70 miles per hour. For a long distance its tracks paralleled those of the steam locomotive, which led to frequent races between steam and electricity; usually won by the interurban, even when pulling a freight car or two, and cheered on by passengers.)

A cedar panel on the site was carved by Marvin Oliver, Quinalt artist: 1976.