

The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649  
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

### Landmark NOMINATION Application

**Historic / Current Name** Elephant Car Wash Sign

**Historic / Current Use** Business Advertisement / Privately-Owned Art

**Year Built** 1956

**Address** N/A

**Assessor's File No.** N/A

**Legal Description** N/A

**Original Designers** Beatrice Haverfield

**Original Builder** Campbell Neon, Seattle

**Original Owner** A.D.E. Corp / Elephant Car Wash

**Present Owner** Amazon, Inc.

**Owner's Representative:** Justin Ibarra, Project Manager  
Cumming Management Group / Global Real Estate & Facilities  
Seattle  
(702) 810-3509  
ibajusti@amazon.com

**Submitted by** Susan Boyle, Principal  
BOLA Architecture + Planning

**Address** 122 NW 58<sup>th</sup> Street  
Seattle, WA 98107-2027

**Phone** sboyle@bolarch.com / 206.383.2649

**Date** May 26, 2022

**Reviewed (historic preservation officer):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*It's often the little details that help give a city an identity — and neon signs, inconsequential though they might seem, have undoubtedly earned a place in Seattle's skyline. They act as literal beacons in the darkness of long winter nights, and they earn an irrational degree of affection in the process . . .*<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background

This nomination is submitted to the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board on behalf of the present owner of the historic Elephant Car Wash sign. The sign was one of two identifying the business previously situated at the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Battery Street, at the north end of the Denny Regrade neighborhood. Created by a local sign designer, Beatrice Haverfield, the sign was manufactured by Campbell Neon of Seattle, and installed in 1956. Both of the neon signs at the Denny Regrade carwash location were removed from that site in 2020 after the property was sold. The subject sign is currently undergoing restoration by Western Neon at its south Seattle studio.

The sign is made of a steel frame armature with an enameled sheet metal cabinet and neon tubing. Neon became a popular material for outdoor signage from the 1920s through the 1960s. The Elephant sign's design, message, and original installation recall the emergence of the auto era of post-war Seattle, and the optimistic pop aesthetic sensibility of its time. The present owner of the subject Elephant Car Wash sign recognizes this significance. It is seeking landmark status while it plans for the future of the sign and its installation at an associated site in close proximity to the original location.

### Research

This report was prepared by Susan Boyle, Principal of BOLA Architecture + Planning, Seattle, with research assistance by consulting historian Marissa Tsaniff. Historian Brad Holden contributed to the report with a biography of Beatrice Haverfield, the original sign designer, based on his research about her life and career. Site tours were undertaken in January 2022 to view the former car wash location and to document the sign at the studios of Western Neon.

Research also involved other sources of information:

- Publications and websites about historic signs, neon technology and signs, neon art, and the history of Aurora Avenue, and the rise of American auto culture
- Information about roadside architecture and roadside attractions from the Vernacular Architecture Forum and Society of Commercial Archaeology websites
- Permit records of the original car wash from the Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) and historic King County assessor's records from Puget Sound Regional Archives
- Historic real estate maps and city directories from the Seattle Public Library collections
- Historic maps and photos from the University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, Seattle Municipal Archives, Museum of History and Industry, and Seattle Municipal Archives

---

<sup>1</sup> Allen, Samantha, "Neon is a symbol of Seattle's past. What will illuminate its future?" *Crosscuts*, September 20, 2019

- Historic property inventories, and local and National Register of Historic Places nominations
- Information about the Elephant Car Wash from the business website and from a phone interview with family members of one of the original owners, Archie Anderson
- Information about the rise of auto culture in 20<sup>th</sup> century Seattle from online sources, publications, prior landmark nomination reports and surveys of the city's "Auto Rows"
- Information about the surrounding Denny Regrade neighborhood from HistoryLink.org, the 1975 Nyberg-Steinbrueck Urban Inventory, and other published sources
- Archival *Seattle Post Intelligencer* and *Seattle Times* articles, and blogs and television reports
- Phone interviews with family members of Beatrice Haverfield, the original sign designer

### Seattle's Landmarks Process

{Note: This section summarizes information for readers unfamiliar with Seattle's landmark process.}

Historic landmarks are individual properties that are recognized locally, regionally, or nationally as important resources to the community, city, state, or nation. Official recognition locally by the City of Seattle's designation of a property as a historic landmark. In Seattle, a landmark may be a building, structure, landscape, or an object. The latter include several designated street clocks and statues. Seattle's landmarks process is a multi-part proceeding of three sequential steps:

- 1) a review of the nomination and its approval or rejection by the Landmarks Preservation Board
- 2) a second review and a designation or its rejection by the Board
- 3) negotiation of controls and incentives by the property owner and the City's Historic Preservation Office and its approval by the Board

A last step in the landmarks process is passage of a designation ordinance by the City Council. These steps all occur with public hearings to allow input from the property owner, applicant, the public, and other interested parties. Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board evaluation of a property cannot consider future changes or uses, or other land use issues. The Preservation Ordinance (SMC 25.12.350) requires a property to be more than 25 years old, and "have significant character, interest or value, as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, State or Nation." It must have integrity, or the ability to convey its significance and meet one or more of six designation criteria:

- Criterion A. It is the location of, or is associated in a significant way with, an historic event with a significant effect upon the community, City, state, or nation*
- Criterion B. It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the City, state, or nation.*
- Criterion C. It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, City, state, or nation.*
- Criterion D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction*
- Criterion E. It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder.*
- Criterion F. Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the City and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the City.*

**2. PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Historic and Current Name: Elephant Car Wash Sign

Prior Location: Originally installed at the 616 Battery Street location of the Elephant Car Wash at the intersection of Denny Way in Seattle’s Denny Regrade neighborhood, and proposed for a new Regrade location.

Original Fabrication Date: 1956

Original Sign Designer: Beatrice Haverfield

Original Manufacturer: Campbell Neon, Seattle

Original Use: Business Advertising Sign

Proposed Use: Privately Owned Public Art

Original Owner: A.D.E. Corp., dba Elephant Car Wash, headed by Eldon Anderson along with brothers, Dean and Archie Anderson

Current Owner: Amazon, Inc.

Owner’s Representative: Justin Ibarra, Project Manager  
Cumming Management Group / Global Real Estate & Facilities, Seattle  
(702) 810-3509  
ibajusti@amazon.com

Report Author: Susan D. Boyle, Principal  
BOLA Architecture + Planning  
122 NW 58<sup>th</sup> Street  
Seattle, WA 98107  
206-383-2649  
sboyle@bolarch.com

## 2. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### The Original Location

The subject of this nomination is a large neon sign previously placed at a highly visible corner location of a car wash business. **(Figures 1-3)** The business property included a low-scale, 4,100 square foot flat roof structure on an 18,965 square foot (0.44-acre) parcel at the corner of Denny Way and Battery Street, between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues. The prominent site was located on Block W of Bells 6<sup>th</sup> Addition to the City of Seattle. Its irregular triangular shape resulted from a realignment of streets in the early 1950s following the opening of the Battery Street tunnel connection from the waterfront to Aurora Avenue N/Highway 99. **(Figures 13-15.)** The irregular, L-shaped, single story structure was placed on the site at an angle to accommodate cars entering it on the east and exiting on the southwest.<sup>2</sup> In 1967 the building was altered by builder Charles Tuttle at an estimated cost of \$10,000.<sup>3</sup>

This particular location is closely associated with the city's mid-century auto culture due to its prominence at the north-bound entry to and south-bound exit from Aurora Avenue N. The site provided optimal visibility to vehicle drivers and easy access to the car wash, and this visibility was emphasized by two bright neon signs. **(Figure 21.)**

A prominent sign was placed at the northwest and southwest corners of this site, each supported on painted steel posts. Both signs were double-sided, and both depicted the profile form of an elephant outlined with neon and detailed with neon imagery and lettering. The subject sign was located at the site's south corner. The companion sign, at the north end, was larger and rotated, and it was detailed with small sheet metal elephants at its base, and blinking lights. **(Figures 25 & 26.)** Each sign was supported by a steel support column with a shaped extension on a base.

### The Elephant Sign

The subject sign has a steel framed internal structure that serves as an armature for its painted sheet metal exterior cabinet, which is 1'-0"-wide. As shown in an original sketch and current drawings, the sign measures 10'-2"-wide and 9'-10"-tall including a base to which the two feet are attached. **(Figures 18, 19 & 29)** A 6"-diameter steel pole connects the internal frame within the cabinet to a subgrade footing support.

The sign's sheet metal cabinet is painted pink and outlined, with red, white, and black lettering. **(Figures 4-7)** On one side neon tubes outline the elephant's outer profile, and its wavy ear, jaws, smiling mouth, trunk, and tail in a deep pink color. **(Figures 2 & 3)** The small pillbox hat that it wears is made with orange and pink colored neon tubes, and the elephant's eye is a light blue neon circle and its eyebrow a similar color. **(Figure 8-10)** Green neon outlines the water squirting from its trunk, and the large cursive script on the body that reads, "Super" while smaller capitalized orange print identifies, "Elephant" and "Car Wash" above and below. Near the lower edge thinner linework notes "Open."

---

<sup>2</sup> King County GIS, Aerial Parcel Maps of 1936 and 2017, and King County Department of Assessment Property Detail Report, Parcel No. 069700-0325.

<sup>3</sup> *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, "City Building Permits," April 11, 1967, p. 25.

All of the linework and lettering are made with neon and argon-filled glass tubing, phosphorous powder, glass, aluminum, copper, patinated enamel over sheet metal with electromagnetic transformers, an animator, carbon steel and stainless steel hardware. The sign has all of the exposed neon tubing mounted to the cabinet and all other elements, such as transformers and secondary wiring, are housed within the cabinet. The neon tubes are attached to one side of the cabinet as it was originally, while the opposite side retains the original painting. The figure of the elephant is rendered in a cartoon-like manner through paint as well as neon tubing as a contour outline. The companion sign at the north end of the original site had some of these same features.

The car wash sign was maintained at the original location with many decades of repairs and replacement of broken tubes. Such repairs likely occurred repeatedly as neon tubes are estimated to last on average only 8 to 15 years. In ca. 1970 much of the tubing was replaced-in-kind, and the steel cabinet was repainted at least once in late 2010.<sup>4</sup> In 2020 both of the elephant signs were moved from their original site after the car wash business was closed by its operator, and the site was sold by the property owner.

The subject sign is being repaired and restored by Western Neon at its studios on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue S in south Seattle. (**Figures 4-12.**) The owner's proposed plan calls for the subject sign to be placed on a new open plaza in the Belltown/Denny Regrade neighborhood near the northeast corner of 7th Avenue and Blanchard Street, approximately two blocks to the south of the original location where it will stand as a piece of privately-owned public art accompanied by an interpretive plaque. (**Figures 16-17.**)

### Neon Features and Details

The recent restoration and in-kind repairs were undertaken by a skilled team of neon craftspeople at Western Neon. Western Neon is one of a few specialty sign design and fabrication shops, in contrast to the many neon sign makers of the 1950s and 1960s. (**Figures 30 & 31**)

The restoration process involves removal of the tubes from the sheet metal cabinet., The cabinet is cleaned and old and broken tubing removed. Loose paint is removed and replaced, with color chosen to match the original, and then the surface is finished with a clear protective coating. New tubes, each 15mm to 18mm (approximately ½ to ⅝ ") in diameter, are created with the support of a two-dimensional design based on an original design drawing and the physical piece.

Working with the neon tubes that remain, and with historic photos and the design drawing, the team at Western Neon built a template – essentially a sign blueprint printed on a plotter. The template is laid out on a worktable, and pieces cut from 4 foot-long tubes, heated and bent into the shapes with the template guiding the work. The tubes are clear or coated or pre-colored glass.

When working with neon, a tube bender holds sections of glass into a propane flame and, as the glass becomes supple, the bender blows through a rubber tube into the glass to help the tube retain a shape. The bender quickly comes to the template table with wood blocks to finish the shaping of the hot glass. Once a section of glass is bent into shape an electrode is welded to the ends of the tubes, and it is heated again. (**Figures 11 & 12**)

---

<sup>4</sup> Dylan Neuwirth, of Western Neon, cited the prior repairs and tubing replacement on January 13, 2022. The repainting is cited in the *Seattle Times*, "New Coat for neon pachyderm," October 15, 2010, p. B9.

Through use of a high voltage machine called a bombardier any impurities in the glass are loosened by this heating process, and vacuumed out. Then a noble gas or a mix of such gasses – neon, argon, krypton, helium, and xenon – are pushed into the tube. There is a testing period, and afterwards the tubes are protected until they are attached to the cabinet, wired for electrodes, and turned on. To protect the work, the final installation and lighting of the tubes occurs on the site of the installation.<sup>5</sup>

In some areas of the original elephant sign, it appears that prior repairs resulted in some slippage and mis-alignment. (This is particularly the case where lines of water appear to spray from the elephant's trunk). To reconstruct the original Elephant Car Wash sign design, the tube bender crafts each tube piece slowly to realign the template and bring the in-kind pieces close to the original design created by Bea Haverfield.

---

<sup>5</sup> The repair and restoration methods described in this report were explained and demonstrated. by Dylan Neuwirth and Will Kirtley of Western neon on January 13, 2022. Additional details are shown by Rachel Jones, HGTV Handmade, " From Empty Glass Tubes to Extreme High Voltage, Here's How a Neon Sign is Made," <https://www.hgtv.com/design/make-and-celebrate/handmade/how-a-modern-neon-sign-is-made-pictures>

## 4. HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

### A Brief History of Signs

Signs have been a means of communication since at least medieval times in Western cultures. They are expressive of their era's aesthetics and businesses needs and, when prominent and long-lasting, they "become part of community memory, even outlasting the original business."<sup>6</sup>

Up through the 19<sup>th</sup> century business signs were often painted on walls or glass or rod-supported hanging and blade signs attached to the storefront exterior of a building, most often at pedestrian level and scale. (Figure 39) There were also larger scale signs that could be seen from afar, such as the "ghost signs" painted on masonry walls, or the wall-mounted west-facing sign on the Bell Street Terminal visible from Elliott Bay that announced the Port of Seattle.<sup>7</sup> (Figures 38 & 40) Signs on a commercial building typically serves to make its presence known, and draw in customers. Use of symbols – such as those on early taverns – typically represented the business activity, and this traditional form of communication extended to the present. This is exemplified by the *Post Intelligencer* globe – a typical symbol for media connecting world-wide events – installed at the newspaper's former headquarters and printing plant at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Wall Street in 1948. (Figures 50 & 51)

Nighttime illumination emerged in cities and towns in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, provided by candles and gas-fueled light fixtures. The P.T. Barnum company drew customers to its circus in 1840 by building a gas-lit sign, but it was the invention of electrical lighting in the late 1800s that resulted in illuminated billboards as well as a sense of movement from blinking sequential lamps. With the advent of train and vehicular travel in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, signs became brighter to attract the attention of people in motion. (Figures 38-42.) Neon lettering identified both businesses and messages. (Figures 43-47) Because neon can catch the eye from passing vehicles, and is luminous at night, it was often used in advertisement signs associated with auto dealerships, services, and parts. (Figures 54 & 55.)

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century cities, such as Seattle, capitalized on sources of electricity to communicate their sense of progressive growth and urbanity through the installation of street lighting. In 1909, with the completion of its Lake Union Steam Plant, this claim was made literal through the illumination in the tall windows facing onto South Lake Union, "City Light." (Figure 59) New roads and bridges were illuminated. (Figure 71.) Repetitive messaging also emerged along with letters, such as the Rainier "R" and symbols, such as the Mobile gas station winged horse or the noodle bowl to identify and brand both mass-market products and specialized retailers. (Figures 48 & 49)

With greater urban density signs on buildings were relocated to rooftop locations as exemplified by two scaffold type signs in Seattle on former commercial bakeries – the Wonderbread bakery's tall letters on its S Jackson Street bakery (Figure 46, replicated), and the 130 foot-long Grandma's Cookies plant on N 34<sup>th</sup> Street in Wallingford (Figure 40, demolished) – as well as by the sign remaining atop the Roosevelt Hotel/Theodore Hotel in downtown Seattle (ca. 1928). (Figures 40, 52 & 53) Similar signs publicized

<sup>6</sup> Sheridan, Mimi, "The P.I. Globe, City of Seattle Landmark Nomination," 2012, pp. 6-7. The *Post Intelligencer* Globe was designated a landmark with its ordinance citing criteria C, D, E & F

<sup>7</sup> Banel, Felix, "All Over The Map: Giant 'Port of Seattle' sign was a long-ago waterfront landmark," KIRO NW, October 23, 2020. The prominent Rainier "R" on the brewery plant rose high above the south Seattle industrial flats to advertise the local brewery's product.



commercial ventures in prominent buildings, high-rise corporate headquarters, and hotels. Others were used to identify institutions, such as the Seattle City Light sign atop its service center. (**Figures 60-62**)

### Neon and Neon Signage

Neon, from the Greek word for new, is a rare gaseous element discovered by William Ramsey and M. W. Travers in 1898 in London, where it was obtained by liquefaction of air and separated from the other gases by distillation. Neon light offers an array of colors that compounds visible light. The gas neon produces a red color, but others are made possible by the use of other noble (non-reactive) gases discovered at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: argon (lavender), mercury (blue), helium (gold), krypton (green), and xenon (gray-blue) along with phosphor coating of glass tubes (green and a range of pastels), and colored glass tubing. The result is more than 150 colors, all luminous with magical effect.

These discoveries occurred during the golden age of chemistry and the initial period of electrification, when physicists and inventors sought means to create electrical light, such as vapor discharge lamps. The use of neon in lamping was invented in 1898 by a French engineer and chemist Georges Claude (1870-1960). In ca. 1902 he applied an electrical discharge to a sealed glass tube of neon gas to create a lamp. He displayed the neon lighting tube in Paris in 1910, illuminated the Parisian Luna Park in 1911, and created the first neon advertisement in a 1913 sign for Cinzano vermouth. Claude patented his invention in 1915 (U.S. Patent 1,125,4760). Despite these European origins, neon signage emerged an American story when Claude's invention had its first commercial application in two neon signs his company designed and manufactured for Earl Anthon's Los Angeles Packard auto dealership in 1923. "Neon lighting quickly became a popular fixture in outdoor advertising. Visible even in daylight . . . the first neon signs [were] dubbed 'liquid fire.'"<sup>8</sup>

Commercial neon signage was seen throughout North America in the mid-1920s through the 1930s in established urban areas, and it gained renewed popularity in the post-war era. The assemblage of four to eight foot-long glass tubes allowed neon to take the form of any linework – letters, script, numbers, abstract shapes, and figurative outlines in a wide variety of colors, and even moving shapes. (**Figures 51 & 52**) The sign designs represented popular styles, from Art Deco and Moderne and to free-form and futuristic shapes in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>9</sup> Today these signs are recognized as part of American pop culture by artists, architects, collectors, and the general public. As critic Tom Wolfe cited their power in his description of Las Vegas in the mid-1960s:

One can look at Las Vegas from a mile away on Route 91 and see no buildings, no trees, only signs. But such signs! They tower. They revolve, they oscillate, they soar in shapes before which the existing vocabulary of art history is helpless. I can only attempt to supply names—Boomerang Modern, Palette Curvilinear, Flash Gordon, Ming-Alert Spiral, McDonald's Hamburger Parabola, Mint Casino Elliptical, Miami Beach Kidney. Las Vegas' sign makers work so far out beyond the frontiers of conventional studio art that they have no names themselves for the forms they create.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Bellis, "The History of Neon Signs – George Claude and Liquid Fire," February 3, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Auer, Michael, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfe, Tom, "Las Vegas!" *Esquire*, February 1, 1964. In his 1965 book, *Electric Kandy Kolorod Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Wolfe further explored the imaginative designs of Las Vegas sign designers. Wolfe's fascination with the

The use of neon signs in Seattle emerged in the mid- to late-1920s. Their apparent success may be due to the city's northern location, with gray skies and long winter nights. Among the most recognized of these signs are those at the Pike Place Market at the foot of Pike Street (1928), and the aforementioned Roosevelt Hotel sign (1929). (Figures 56-59) Others graced long gone restaurants, stores, and bars from the 1920s-1960s. (Figures 43 & 44.)

Neon signs inspired the work of many recognized American and European artists in the mid- to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Mario Merz, Bruce Nauman, Dan Flavin, Joseph Kosuth, Lili Lakich, Keith Sonnier, Chrissy, Tracey Emin, and others. Following a trend in contemporary art these artists transformed an aspect of low culture, often associated with the kitsch of urban commerce, into a powerful medium of fine art. These sculptural works explore "the intersection of light, color, and space; as well as pop culture imagery, consumerism, and various themes associated with the contemporary lived environment."<sup>11</sup> Neon remains a medium in fine art. With its vivid luminosity and cosmopolitan roots, it has inspired Northwest artists, such as Sally Banfill, Michael Lindenmeyer, Dylan Neuwirth, Lynn Paul Davis, Kelsey Fernkopf, and others.<sup>12</sup>

Today neon and neon signs also make up historic and art collections, such as those in the Neon Museum of Las Vegas with its Neon Boneyard and collection of over 200 signs and 400 pieces; the Neon Museum, Philadelphia; Pittsburgh Glass Center; National Neon Sign Museum in the Dalles, Oregon; Museum of Neon Art in Los Angeles; and the American Sign Museum in Cincinnati. In Seattle, the Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI) has developed a collection including the larger Elephant Car Wash sign.

Neon signs are so strongly connected with the country's historic pre- and post-war periods that they evoke strong nostalgia. Over time these signs have served as metaphors because of their strong association with the nighttime allure of the 1950s noir era, and romantic interpretations of the earlier seedy side of life of the 1930s and 1940s in novels by Nelsen Algren and Raymond Chandler, and the songs by Cole Porter, Peggy Lee, and others.<sup>13</sup> Other historic signs, such as those at the car wash, provide the simple pleasure of cartoon aesthetics and provoke a humorous response. (Figures 76 & 77.) Beyond humor and romantic nostalgia, the signs hold their own as evocative objects from the recent past. Their nighttime illumination remains compelling in evoking visual and cultural connections.

Some view preservation of the signs in Seattle as symbolic of other historic preservation issues in the city as it has undergone dramatic change in the past two decades.<sup>14</sup> As Seattle artist and Center on Contemporary Art board member Joyce Moty, notes, "Neon can be an object of aesthetic beauty or interest. It's a folk art, tied to different periods of time, documenting the history of the city."<sup>15</sup>

---

luminous vernacular of the city anticipated the later studies by the Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steve Izenour and their influential book, *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972).

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, Toni, "Ten Artists Who Defined the Medium," *Artland* magazine, ca. 2019, <https://magazine.artland.com/neon-art-ten-artists-who-defined-the-medium/>.

<sup>12</sup> "Eyes for Icons – Artist Memorializes Local," *Seattle Times*, August 16, 1999, p. C1. See also Gwendolyn Elliott, "Western Neon Celebrates 33 Years Lighting Up Seattle with a New Art School," *Seattle Magazine*, May 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Ribbat, 2013, pp. 127-149.

<sup>14</sup> Kershaw, Sarah, *New York Times*, March 28, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> *Seattle Times*, "The Night Light - It's a Gas to look at Neon - It Often Gets Glowing Reviews," March 28, 1987, p. C1.

### Seattle's 20<sup>th</sup> Century Auto Culture

By the time the Elephant Car Wash opened at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Battery Street in 1956, the auto era in Seattle was very well established. This era began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when mid-west manufacturers and their nationwide dealership began to sell dozens of available models following the introduction of the first automobile in Seattle in 1900. Auto ownership increased in the city from 400 to 7,500 between 1908 and 1913.<sup>16</sup> By the latter date local dealerships included Packard, Hudson, Pierce Arrow, Chalmer, Winton, Overland as well as Ford, Buick, Cadillac, Studebaker, and others. Most of these were located in Seattle's first "auto row" that emerged on Capitol Hill on and near Broadway and Pike and Pine Streets, along with associated service and repair garages and parts businesses.<sup>17</sup>

These were followed by other dealerships and auto-related buildings located along Westlake Avenue and in the Denny Triangle area in the 1920s including the Ford McKay (1922) and Pacific McKay Lincoln dealerships (1925), M. Gaudy Company dealership (1925), Durant Motor Building (1928), and Firestone Tire Building (1929). Associated supply businesses, service and repair garages affirmed the importance of automobiles in the local economy. By 1907 Standard Oil opened city's first drive-in gas station, and in 1909 there were at least eight tire stores in Seattle. By 1939 there were approximately 40 auto-related businesses along of Westlake Avenue between downtown and south Lake Union.<sup>18</sup> **(Figure 63.)**

Meanwhile, Seattle was growing dramatically, from 80,670 residents in 1900 to 237,194 in 1910, 315,312 in 1920, and 365,583 in 1930. As its population rose and as private cars replaced horses and early mass transit, the city saw profound changes. Perhaps the most impactful of these was the number of motor vehicles. Vehicle registrations in the state increased three-fold from 60,734 in 1916 to 185,359 in 1921, by which time 11 percent of Washington residents owned a car.<sup>19</sup> Auto ownership continued to grow rapidly through 1929, when this figure rose to nearly 25 percent. (Between 1928 and 1929 alone, more than 35,000 new vehicles were registered.) In the following year, however, with onset of the Depression fewer than 3,000 new autos were registered. The 1930s saw a rise in the number of car sales, but only used vehicles.

By the early 1940s the U.S. auto industry had largely recovered from the Depression, but its efforts were redirected to the war effort. Production dropped from 3,250,000 passenger vehicles in 1941 to fewer than 1,000 in 1945.<sup>20</sup> At the war's end it took several years for American factories to reconfigure, and the industry did not introduce new cars until 1949.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, having a car became a necessity, with nationwide vehicle ownership rising from 20 percent in 1930 to 25 percent in 1940, 32 percent in 1950 and over 40 percent in 1960. By 1967 it reached over 50 percent.<sup>22</sup>

Post-war prosperity and new highways, such as Highway 99 and the Battery Street Tunnel, impacted auto production and sales. With the Puget Sound's regional economy booming, construction of new

---

<sup>16</sup> Cited by Berger, *Crosscuts*, October 8, 2013. See also the *Seattle Daily Times*, March 14, 1920, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, Firestone Auto Supply & Service Building Landmark Nomination, December 2015, pp. 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Peterson, "Eberharter Garage/Antique Liquidators Landmark Nomination," October 22, 2014, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Data from the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, cited in Liebs, 1995, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Rae, *American Automobile*, 1965, p. 161.

<sup>21</sup> Weaver, and Historical Research Associates, September 3, 2019, pp. 26-29.

<sup>22</sup> Oak Ridge National Laboratory, "Transportation Energy Data Book: Edition 33," Tables 3.5 and 3.6, July 2014, cited by U.S. Department of Energy, October 6, 2014.

dealerships and associated service centers and garages resumed. Most were built in Seattle’s growing suburbs, but also in the Denny Triangle and Denny Regrade neighborhoods, such as the S.L. Savidge Dealership / Washington Talking Book & Braille Library at 202 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue (1948, designed by NBBJ). The 1950s and 1960s also saw the introduction of foreign cars dealerships in “auto row” of the Westlake corridor.

The mid-century saw additional “auto rows” in Ballard, Roosevelt Way, and Lake City. As auto sales lots soon grew in size many dealerships moved to the “Aurora Speedway” and into new buildings to the north end. Like the Elephant Car Wash these businesses were drawn to highway locations. Five dealerships opened on highway 99/Aurora Avenue N between 1942 and 1967. Relocations by 1969 included Pontiac, Mercury, Dodge, Buick, and other dealerships – all to the blocks between N 120<sup>th</sup> and 130<sup>th</sup> Avenues. By the 1980s, only a few of the auto dealerships remained in the center of the city, while others were its northern and southern parts, or established in Bellevue and Kirkland, north in Lynnwood, and south in Kent and Auburn.<sup>23</sup>

The architectural style of the new post-war, low-rise building types included Stepped and Streamline Moderne and big- box International Style structures. The highly glazed, object like showrooms, surrounded by sales lots, were typically announced with bold, up-scaled, eye-catching illuminated signage. Stylized buildings also emerged for associated businesses, such as service stations. **(Figure 69.)**

Along with the dealerships, other new auto-oriented building types emerged during the post-war period, such as drive-in restaurants. The Igloo, a diner and drive-in restaurant at the southeast corner of 6th Avenue and Denny Way operated from two attention-grabbing domed building in 1940 to 1954.<sup>24</sup> **(Figures 76 & 77.)** Drive-ins emerged in neighborhoods, such as Dick’s on NE 45<sup>th</sup> Street and Wallingford and Broadway on Capitol Hill (ca. 1954), and Dag’s on Aurora **(Figure 72.)** both national fast-food chains and local drive-ins were built along major roads and highways. Like the Elephant Car Wash, these new auto-related businesses relied on large, neon signs to draw customers from their cars.

In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century auto culture in Washington state continued to grow, along with its increased population, as represented by the car registration and population data:<sup>25</sup>

<u>Date</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Registrations</u>
1950	40,339,077	751,586
1960	61,671,390	1,112,113
1970	89,243,557	1,618,603
1980	121,600,843	2,293,521
1990	133,700,497	2,950,847

Freeway construction has kept up with increased auto use and proliferation of residential suburbs, and malls. The newer highways limit access, commerce, and signage, leaving older routes, such as US Route 66 or Seattle’s Aurora Avenue/ Highway 99, as enduring examples of the early auto roadside culture.

<sup>23</sup> Weaver and Historical Research Associates, September 3, 2019, pp. 30-31.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, updated on August 12, 2002. The Igloo offered curbside service, and advertised itself as “Seattle’s most unique eating place.”

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Federal Highway Administration, April 1997. Increased residential density in its center and more mass transit has impacted one aspect of auto culture, but only in the last few years. Seattle, which had more auto registrations per person than all but one other major American city, saw this number drop in 2021:

### The Elephant Car Wash Business

In 1951 a new car wash opened in Seattle at 2763 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue S at the corner of Lander Street in south Seattle. (**Figure 20.**) Several years later, the same company, owned and operated by three brothers – Eldon, Archie, and Dean Anderson, announced its new facility at the north end of the Denny Regrade neighborhood, close to the “auto row” that had emerged along Westlake Avenue and the Denny Triangle area. (**Figures 21 & 22.**) The brothers’ plan was summarized in a local newspaper article in early November 1956:

An automobile-washing station is under construction at Seventh Avenue and Battery Street for the A.D.E. Corp., Seattle, headed by Eldon Anderson. The station, to be known as the Super Car-Wash, will contain equipment designed by Anderson, for which he has applied for patents. It was designed by Donald Earl Roberts, architects, and is being built by H.E. Forsman, contractor. The site was leased by A.D.E. from the Scott Building Corp., owner. Al Clise of Charles F. Clise, Inc., represented the owner, and Maxine Johnson of Vincent D. Miller, Inc., represented the lessee.<sup>26</sup>

Eldon Anderson and his wife, Virginia, initially established the car wash business in 1951. Theirs was the first automatic car wash in Washington state, with a “hands-free” machine that advanced automobiles safely and use of specialized equipment, such as plastic bristle brushes. (**Figure 33.**) The company’s initial Five Minute Car Wash location was at 2743 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue S, a street that served as an extension of the Pacific Highway, and the primary vehicular entry to the city. The business soon grew under the partnership of Eldon and his brothers. With the prominence of its “world-famous rotating elephant,” installed in 1956 at their 616 Battery Street location, the business soon became known as the Elephant Car Wash. In 1963 the Anderson brothers opened a third facility on downtown Tacoma’s Pacific Avenue. Through the following decades the A.D.E. company expanded the business to a local chain of “hands-free” car washing and auto detailing stations.

In 1959 Eldon and his brother, Archie Anderson, operated the business, serving as the company’s president and vice president, respectively, with assistance from their brother Dean. (**Figure 32.**) That year the brothers remodeled and added onto the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue S property with a design by Seattle architects Jerry Gropp and Ed Barr. The project involved new fencing and siding, an enlargement of the structure and new finishes. By that date, the business was known as Auto-Matic Wash, Inc.<sup>27</sup> In April 1967 the brothers undertook \$10,000 in alterations to their 616 Battery Street location with builder Charles Tuttle according to a building permit.<sup>28</sup>

The Anderson’s local business grew to become part of the region’s vernacular auto culture, along with Sunday family drives, drive-in theaters, and drive-in restaurants. In 1982 the two Elephant Carwash locations, along with other members of the International Carwash Association/National Carwash Council, offered free car washes to customers in advance of the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday, as a patriotic “Happy Birthday America” event. The Battery Street station manager noted, “Who knows with car washes all

---

<sup>26</sup> *Seattle Daily Times*, November 4, 1956, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, November 15, 1959, p. 24. See also *Seattle Daily Times*, November 15, 1959, p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, “City Building Permits,” April 11, 1967, p. 25. No changes were made to the signs.

over the U.S. taking part in this patriotic event maybe we'll even make the Guinness Book of World Records for the most cars washed in a day."<sup>29</sup>

The Andersons sold the two Seattle carwash properties to its current owner, Bob Haney later in 1982, and he went on to expand the company, even in the face of increased competition from other similar businesses as well as coin-operated, do it-yourself washing bays. Oil companies and service stations also offering automated car washes, often free to customers, along with spaces for sale of convenience foods, auto accessories and auto part and accessories. In 1984 the twelfth Brown Bear Carwash opened in Redmond, a \$1,000,000 investment by its local owner, Vic Oderman of Car Wash Enterprises, Inc. Oderman, who had started with a service station and hand car washing business in 1962, then operated the largest car wash business in the region. The businesses proved to be good investments: by 1984 estimated station equipment costs ranged from \$18,000 to \$150,000, and annual profit margins 5 to 10 percent.<sup>30</sup>

The car wash industry played a part in the ever growing car culture of post war America. The International Car Wash Association (ICW) estimates that by 1984 there were 22,000 car wash stations throughout the U.S. Locally there were approximately 70 tunnel-type automated car wash washes businesses, with an additional 70 throughout the state. Of these, the Elephant Carwash at 6<sup>th</sup> and Battery Street was reportedly the largest single operation in the region, handling up to 1,000 cars each day with full-service cleaning rather than exterior washing only. **(Figures 23 & 24.)** By that date, the station sold fuel, beverages, snacks, auto accessories, and shoeshine services in addition to its signature automated washing and hand detailing, under the direction of its location manager, Ann Simmons, and 39 full and part-time employees. By that time, the elephant had become an iconic symbol that branded the business.

In early 2020, the ICW undertook a study to quantify the size of the American car wash industry. It identified a total of nearly 62,700 locations, with more than 16,000 self-serve stations, approximately 17,500 conveyor types, and 29,000 in-bay automatic or roll-over car wash stations. In addition, in Europe there were an estimated 69,000 locations and in Australia 1,950. This same study identified trends, among them that in America and Europe drivers preferred to have their cars washed rather than doing it themselves. Retail sales in 2020 totaled approximately \$15 billion, and the industry employed more than 220,000 full time workers and an additional 15,000 within vendors providing equipment and chemical sales and services.<sup>31</sup>

In March 2020, the Denny Regrade Elephant Carwash was closed temporarily in response to pandemic lockdown orders. The business closed permanently late that year, a victim of both the loss of revenue during the pandemic and high operation costs in the rapidly developing neighborhood. As the owner explained in a local newspaper article, "The cost of maintaining operations of the Elephant Super Car

---

<sup>29</sup> Quote from an advertisement in the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, July 1, 1982, p. 39, "Patriotic bath for your car."

<sup>30</sup> *Seattle Daily Times* (online), August 14, 1984, p. 43. "Carwash Operators Cleaning Up," p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> ICW, "Industry Information," <https://www.carwash.org/industry-information>. During the period from 1994 to 2019 the professional car wash market increased from 48 percent to 77 percent of the market. Most of the car wash locations in the U.S. are owned and operated by small to medium size independent companies. Those with more than four stations represent only 15 percent of all locations while large companies only 2 percent.

Wash on Denny and Battery are very high . . . Downtown property taxes and monthly leases have increased to the point that the car wash is no longer able to cover those expenses and pay our employees at the minimum wage that the city of Seattle requires.” As the article further noted, “The carwash, which pays taxes on the site, has seen its bill rise 31% since 2017, from \$129,510 to \$169,242 . . . [The carwash] lot is appraised at nearly \$20 million, or \$1,050 per square foot, according to the assessor’s data, making it one of the highest-value empty lots in the city.”<sup>32</sup>

The Anderson brothers reportedly sold the last of their three original Elephant Car Wash stations – the one in Tacoma – in the 1980s. Presently there are 14 Elephant Car Wash facilities located throughout the south Puget Sound in Auburn, Boney Lake, Covington, Federal Way (two locations), Gig Harbor, Lacey, Maple Valley, Olympia, Puyallup (three locations), Sumner, and one recent operation in Bellevue.<sup>33</sup> The business, established and led by Bob Haney after he purchased the Anderson’s car wash locations, remains family-owned and operated.<sup>34</sup> The elephant sign, used originally in 1951, remains at these other locations. Because the neon elephant is such a recognizable appealing image it has also been used by other entities, such as the Seattle Children’s Research Institute.<sup>35</sup> (Figures 35-37.)

According to recent job opening notices, the current hourly wage paid to detailers by the Elephant Car Wash in several King County locations is set at \$13.69.<sup>36</sup> This detail and the industry’s employment data raise an important feature about the local business and the carwash industry as a whole: its role as an employer in the social realm of labor history. Traditionally the Elephant Car Wash business engaged workers from diverse walks of life for the cleaning and washing of cars. Employment ads from the 1970s to the present day call for able-bodied people with a strong work ethic.

Archie Anderson’s family members confirm this approach to hiring: the brothers often sought workers from local shelters or missions. Employees included the transients – the homeless and recently released – as well as local residents, women as well as men, and people of all races and ethnicity. While the Elephant Car Wash had regular employees, it paid these workers on a daily basis, allowing them to address their immediate livelihood needs regardless of what might be transitory residence or other barriers to typical employment. At the same time, by employing day labor, the process was beneficial for the business by providing flexibility in response to its labor needs.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Long, Katherine Khashimova, *Seattle Times*, October 9, 2020, p. A1.

<sup>33</sup> Elephant Car Wash, <https://www.elephantcarwash.com/about-us/history/> The original south Seattle location closed in 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Banel, Felix, “The forgotten designed behind Seattle’s most iconic neon signs,” KIRO My Northwest, February 6, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> The elephant, an exotic and beloved animal, was long associated with circuses, starting with Jumbo, the elephant, superstar of the Victorian era, and P.T. Barnum’s sensation, who arrived with fanfare in New York in 1882, whose persona was later carried through to Walt Disney’s Dumbo. See Glaser, Petr, “Jumbo The Elephant,” *Society of Commercial Archaeology Journal*, Fall 2018, Vol. 36, No. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Elephant Car Wash, <https://www.elephantcarwash.com/job-openings/>

<sup>37</sup> Flexible scheduling was critical to operating the car wash. Rich Fromme, the son-in-law of Archie Anderson, recollected in an interview, of needing a crew of four one day and then a crew of 30 the next, the weather often being a factor in demand for car washes.

### The Original Owners – Eldon, Archie, and Dean Anderson

Three brothers – Eldon, Archie, and Dean Anderson – opened the Elephant Carwash business under their company name, A.D.& E. Corp in the early 1950s. The local roots begin in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when their family came west. Their parents, Anker Morris Anderson and Emillie Katrina Christensen, married in Minnesota in 1907. **(Figure 32.)** Both Anker and Emillie were born in Minnesota; his family having emigrated from Norway and her family from Denmark. By 1908 they were living in Western Washington with their first son, Milton. They were a farmer family with five sons and one daughter all born between 1908 and 1923. Other members of both their families would come west and settle in Washington over the coming years and the Anker Anderson family settled in Oak Harbor in 1912.<sup>38</sup>

Eldon Hadley Anderson (1910 – 1999) was the couple’s second child. He grew to be a mechanically minded young man, and worked as a steam shovel operator in the building of the Deception Pass Bridge. During World War II he was employed at Boeing as a supervisor in the metal stamping shop. Eldon developed some of the first mechanical car wash technology.<sup>39</sup> Before the 1950s car washing was done with men pushing the car through a tunnel or with a winch and pulley. The winch and pulley worked well enough until a customer stepped on the brakes. In 1956 Eldon Anderson received a patent for a “vehicle drier nozzle with a self-positioning mount,” and he applied for another patent in 1958 for an “automobile guiding device.” His 1960 patented device remains in use today to vehicle guide tires of assorted sizes onto a moving conveyor belt.<sup>40</sup> **(Figure 33)**

Archie Wallace Harvey Anderson (1916 – 2001) was the third Anderson child. In a recent interview with his living children – Lana, Carmen, and Adrian, and Eldon’s son-in-law, Richard Fromme – Archie was described as one who would jump into the tunnel and start washing cars on a busy day.<sup>41</sup> For many years of their partnership Eldon and Densmore “Dean” Goodwin Anderson (1918 – 2009), were silent partners while Archie ran the business, working mostly out of the “4th South” location. But he put a lot of miles on his car working between the Tacoma and Battery street locations.

The three brothers undertook complementary roles in the business. Eldon started the whole thing, and Archie ran it, while “Dean” Goodwin Anderson often returned to farming on Whidbey Island where he raised poultry, livestock, and horses. Archie’s children remember Dean as a great jokester, and one who could fix anything at the car washes.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Ancestry.com *Anker Anderson*, <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/1005849/person/-2016957851/facts>

<sup>39</sup> “Obituary” *Tribute Archive*, <https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/11812153/Virginia-Anderson, Virginia Anderson>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://patents.google.com/?assignee=Eldon+H+Anderson>

<sup>41</sup> Richard Fromme, a car care professional, married to Eldon’s daughter, Marilyn. A Navy veteran, he joined the family business in 1959. He patented a rotary dry wiping system for vehicles, and opened the Rancho Mirage Super Car Wash in the Palm Springs area of California with Eldon. This facility, still in operation, utilizes a similar neon elephant sign as the Seattle locations.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Fromme, telephone interview, January 7, 2022. According to his obituary, “Dean operated his farm for much of his life. He and Vivian raised turkeys, chickens, registered Black Angus cattle, dairy cattle and horses.” “Dean Anderson” (obituary, *Legacy.com*, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/skagitvalleyherald/name/dean-anderson-obituary?id=28618204>).



While they went into business together as A.D.& E. Corp, the three brothers also did business later under the names Kar Laundry, Inc., Auto-Matic Wash Inc., and Ancon Corp.<sup>43</sup> They made major decisions together and respected each other's contributions. They were known for hosting business meetings at another Seattle institution, the Dog House restaurant and bar at 7<sup>th</sup> and Bell. (**Figure \_\_.**)

While the current car wash business operates under a different ownership, it continues to follow the workplace traditions and business goals set originally by the three Anderson brothers:

The Elephant Car Wash's rotating pink elephant is as much a Seattle landmark as its neighbor, the Space Needle. Established in 1951, we are proud to be a Puget Sound tradition, offering exceptional full-service car washes to generations of loyal customers. Through the years we've seen celebrities, politicians, foreign diplomats, and past United States Presidents (complete with full security detail!) visit. We're privileged to have some of the Northwest's leading companies, city, state, and federal officials, military, and media outlets as clients . . . Our customers know the Pink Elephant icon is a symbol of outstanding car wash service, at a rate far less than the cost of a full-detail.<sup>44</sup>

### **Aurora Avenue and Its Roadside Attractions**

The Andersons brothers opened their car wash business with keen insight into the growing post-war market for auto services. They chose the Denny Regrade location for their second car wash due to its close proximity to SR 99, Aurora Avenue, and the Bell Street Tunnel, as well as the many nearby auto dealerships and associated businesses in the "auto rows" of South Lake Union, Denny Triangle and Denny Regrade areas.

The route of Aurora Avenue N was once known as the Trunk Road or R. F. Murrow Road in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Areas to the north of Seattle were served also by the Seattle-Everett and Interurban Railway from 1906 to 1939. Aurora Avenue, which followed, became the preferred route after it was expanded from a wagon road and paved with bricks in 1913 and asphalt in 1928. Bus service, established along it as early as 1915, was expanded after construction of the George Washington / Aurora Bridge in 1932. (**Figure 71.**) Early development along the street was mixed, and included residences along with lumber mills and retail stores. Many of these were replaced in the late 1920s and early 1930s by auto courts and motels, repair shops, gas stations, and dealerships.<sup>45</sup>

In 1923 the City of Seattle established land use laws that regulated development throughout the city, including the blocks along Aurora Avenue up to North 85<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>46</sup> The street's unique character emerged during this period, with the rise of auto era, and construction of motels, motor inns and roadhouses. Some of these businesses were located north of the city limits along 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue to circumvent local vice laws and prohibition.

---

<sup>43</sup> *Seattle Daily Times*, November 10, 1970 "Car Wash Sold," p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> Elephant Car Wash, "About Us," <https://www.elephantcarwash.com/about-us/>

<sup>45</sup> Sheridan and Tobin, "Licton Springs, A Neighborhood History," 2012.

<sup>46</sup> The area to the north of 85<sup>th</sup> Street remained less regulated until it was annexed by Seattle between 1947 and 1954. This early distinction may be seen in the greater number of large parcels and auto-oriented development north of North 85th Street on Aurora Avenue North.

Washington State Route 99 extended the Pacific Highway, which linked the western states from the Canadian to Mexican borders. Authorized in the 1920s it was one of 15 primary highways in the state. Up through the 1940s the highway ran originally thru the city center on 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues to meet Aurora Avenue. Affirming its use, parts of the road to the north of the bridge, were long known as the “Aurora Speedway.”) In 1944, in response to increased vehicle use the federal highway act provided additional funding for highways, and raised design standards. After World War II the Washington State Legislature authorized limited-access highways with higher speeds and additional safety designs in 1947. To address SR99, the state’s most heavily used highway, new rights-of-way were acquired to widen Aurora Avenue N from six and eight lanes, and the Alaska Way Viaduct and Battery Street tunnel were built in 1950-1954.<sup>47</sup>

New building designs and new signage emerged with to attract drivers. Expressive forms, they represent the romance of the road. The Igloo, a drive-in with carhop service located near Denny Way, was built in 1940.<sup>48</sup> Roadside buildings along Aurora also include the eclectic style Arabian Theater at 7610 Aurora Avenue N (1925), Art Deco style Signal Gas Station at 80<sup>th</sup> Street (1929), the former Twin Teepees at 7201 Aurora Avenue N (1937-2001) Three-dimensional elephant above the Aurora Flower Shop/Aurora Rents at 8808 Aurora Avenue N (1946). (**Figures 69-72**) Later drive-in businesses emerged, such as the former Dag’s at 800 Aurora Avenue N (1955), and Burgermaster at 9820 Aurora Avenue N (ca 1955).<sup>49</sup>

By the mid-century Aurora Avenue / Highway 99 and was well-established as Seattle’s major north-south arterial. Business development near it in the Regrade area included retailers, auto dealerships and other auto-related buildings, as well as broadcasting stations that needed accessible, large parcels for their studios. In early 1952 KING Broadcasting announced its new 30,000 square foot “Television Center” to be built at 320 Aurora Avenue.<sup>50</sup> KOMO and KIRO also built their stations in the Regrade area. Later, with the planning and development of the Century 21 World’s Fair, nearby blocks gained additional motels and restaurants.

Critical to the planning and design of Highway 99 and the Alaska Way Viaduct was its bypass routing, which moved traffic past rather than into the city center. This route included the Battery Street Tunnel, the 2,134 foot-long extension that ended below Denny Way and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. By the time it opened in mid-1954, Aurora Avenue had been widened to allow for an exit and entry. Construction of surface fans and vents for the tunnel cut through the block bordered by 6th and 7th Avenues and Battery and Wall streets, resulting in a new 60 foot-wide city right-of-way, and two small triangular shaped lots. (**Figure 13.**) The lots remained in private ownership by the Clise company. Construction of the Elephant Car Wash followed in 1956. Its location was optimal, in proximity to other nearby auto-related businesses, but also for visibility in the midst of traffic.

---

<sup>47</sup> Artifacts and the SRI Foundation, “Washington State’s Historic State Roads, Historic Context,” January 2014, p. 34-47, 61, 112-114. The 1947 federal highway act of 1956 that financed the first elements of the county’s interstate system, which led to construction of Interstate 5, which opened between Seattle and Tacoma in 1965. See also Jennifer Ott, “Alaskan Way Viaduct Part 3: Building the Viaduct,” HistoryLink.org Essay 9978, December 3, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Stein, August 12, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> Dorpat, “Where’s the Beef,” June 11, 2011. In 2004, when the Society of Commercial Archaeology held its annual conference in Seattle, it highlighted the roadside attractions of Aurora Avenue, its drive-ins, motels, and signage.

<sup>50</sup> *Seattle Times*, January 25, 1952, p. 12.

Aurora Avenue /Highway served as Seattle’s primary freeway until completion of the I-5 freeway in the early 1960s.<sup>51</sup> But even after the new interstate opened, Highway 99 remained vital as the location of big-box stores, and both large and small strip malls with franchise operations. Its accessibility, convenient parking, comparative low rent and property values also attracted smaller and more eccentric retail businesses that drew customers from their vehicles.

The expansion of Seattle’s roadside and highway system, and the use of neon signage coincided with the city’s aspirational period of urbanization: “Neon coincided quite literally with Seattle’s coming of age . . . neon (signage) was a visual way of signifying that this was a place of sophistication, this was a 24-hour place, this was a place that had bright lights and big stores and exciting activity . . . the development of neon as a feature of the Seattle skyline really [aligns] with Seattle’s own self-consciousness as an important place.”<sup>52</sup>

Expansion of the highway system, planning for the interstate and for a major exhibition at the civic center were all part of Seattle’s growing sense of self. Northwest Regional architecture from the mid-century is an important and long-lasting legacy from the post-war period, but not the only legacy. A vernacular cityscape also emerged, and it continues. (**Figures 77-78**) The roadside pop culture endures, of which the pink neon elephant sign is a significant part. (**Figures 34 & 37.**)

### The Original Sign Designer, Beatrice Haverfield <sup>53</sup>

Beatrice Haverfield (1913 – 1996) was one of Seattle’s preeminent commercial sign designers, and the creator of the Elephant Car Wash sign design. (**Figures 27 & 29**) She was born in Seattle to Finnish immigrants. Her mother was a chef at the Olympic Hotel, while her father, August Kiva, worked at the Seattle Gas Light Company at Gas Works Park. Recognized as a girl for her artistic talent she graduated from Franklin High School in the 1930s. She married a fellow student, Elden Filer, and the two soon started a sign business in Seattle, with Bea serving as the designer and her husband as the fabricator. During World War II Elden served in the military and Bea worked for Boeing in south Seattle.

After the war, the couple resumed their business. They soon joined another local company, Campbell Neon in ca 1946, where Beatrice became one of the lead designers. Among her early works was a neon sign for Ivar Haglund’s waterfront café on Pier 54, which read in her stylish cursive script, “Ivar’s” (**Figure 28**). She also created a boomerang-shaped design for the Chubby and Tubby retail store on Rainier Avenue S, and the original Rainier “R” that overlooked south Seattle (**Figure 49**). She was responsible also for a neon sign at the Hat n’ Boots gas station at its original E Marginal Way location, a large sign on Highway 99 for the Sunny Jim preserves plant on Airport Way S, and many others.

---

<sup>51</sup> Garfield, Leonard, July 7, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Leonard Garfield, quoted by Samantha Allen, “Neon is a symbol of Seattle’s past. What will illuminate its future?” *Crosscuts*, September 20, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> This biographical sketch is derived from Brad Holden’s profile of Beatrice Haverfield, the original sign designer, in the *Seattle Times Pacific Northwest*, January 26, 2020. Information came also from his interviews with her family members.

Beatrice continued to work in the 1950s despite her divorce from Elden and marriage to Robert Haverfield, a local cabinet maker, and the birth of the first of their four children. She created the signature cursive sign for Dick's new drive-in on NE 45<sup>th</sup> Street in Seattle's Wallingford neighborhood in 1954, and the iconic signs for the Elephant Car Wash in 1956.

While the concept of an elephant is attributed to Archie Anderson, and the image of a pachyderm with a spraying trunk is credited to local design firm, Tube Art Inc., Beatrice developed the design and added her own flourishes, including the four smaller elephants at the base of the north end sign which represented each of her own four children. This neon sign also rotated and featured hundreds of blinking lights. She designed the original Cinerama sign at the Paramount Theater in 1956, and she also helped design the first sign for the Cinerama theater on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Beatrice's design career ended abruptly in the late-1960s after she was injured in a car accident and lost some of her acute vision. She left Campbell Neon in 1968, although her daughter, Barbara, continued to work with the company. In late 1968 her husband, Robert Haverfield, died. In 1969 she began working again, initially as a secretary at South Seattle Community College where she eventually became a faculty member in the horticulture program. During this period, she also emerged as a local anti-war activist.

Beatrice Haverfield died in 1996 at the age of 83. Her artistic legacy continued, however, in the highly visible neon signs that represent the transformation of Seattle from a provincial blue collar city to a prominent Pacific coast metropolis. Her artistic talents are recognized in local publications and presentations, and in an exhibit at the Edmonds Historical Museum in 2020-2021.

### **Campbell Neon and Other Seattle Sign Makers**

Campbell Neon, a local Seattle manufacturer, was responsible for the design and fabrication of the Elephant Car Wash sign in 1956. The company was founded in 1924 by Vernon Campbell.

Vern Campbell (1907-2008) was born in Walhalla, North Dakota to Archibald and Beatrice Campbell, the eldest of four children. His family immigrated to Canada where Vern grew up in Saskatchewan and Alberta before returning to the United States in 1924. He and his father established Campbell Neon in Seattle, one of the first local sign companies in the city to use neon. The business was responsible for some of the city's most memorable signs, including some at the Pike Place Market, Ray's Boathouse, the Doghouse Restaurant, Hat 'n Boot gas station, Ivar's central waterfront restaurant and Dick's Drive-In. Many of these signs were designed by Beatrice Haverfield as an employee at Campbell Neon.

Vern Campbell later turned to contracting with a partner, Halton Molvik, and built houses and many apartment buildings throughout Seattle. He remained active in this contracting business until his death in 2008. His other interests included skating: he was active in the Seattle Skating Club and was a National Figure Skating judge for over 50 years.<sup>54</sup> Other post-war neon sign makers in the city included the Meyer Sign Company, owned by Bill Kline, established in 1947, and Tube Art, which later became the Tube Art Group. **(Figures 30 & 31)**

---

<sup>54</sup> "Vernon Campbell" (obituary), *Seattle Times*, June 22, 2008 (available through Legacy.com).

An informal survey and a self-guided tour of neon signage in Seattle in 1987 cited the elephant car wash signs as well as older signs for the Varsity, Neptune, Broadway, and Guild 45<sup>th</sup> cinemas, the bucking horse sign at the Buckaroo Tavern in Fremont, along with newer signs at F.X. McRory's Restaurant in Pioneer Square, Roxy Music in the University District, Alderwood and Oak Tree Cinemas, and the Kirkland Roaster and Ale House in Kirkland. The installation and required periodic maintenance of these and other neon signs has helped retain the number of local sign manufacturers and studios. In 1985 Western Neon was founded, and by the late 1980s two other commercial neon artist studios were established in Seattle, Neo Neon and Neon Beach. Many of those who work in the field of neon cite Seattle, with its gray skies and long dark nights, as having more neon signs than any other city in the U.S. with exception of Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

#### 4. BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

Allen, Samantha, "Neon is a symbol of Seattle's past. What will illuminate its future?" *Crosscuts*, September 20, 2019.

Artifacts and the SRI Foundation, "Washington State's Historic State Roads, Historic Context," January 2014, pp. 34-47, 61, 112-114.

Aurora Merchants Association, Inc.

"History," <http://auroramerchants.org/about-us/history> (accessed n 2012).

Garneau, Faye M., "History of Aurora" in Aurora Avenue Merchants Association Newsletter.

Banel, Felix, KIRO My NW

"The forgotten designed behind Seattle's most iconic neon signs," February 6, 2020.

"All Over the Map: Giant 'Port of Seattle' Was Long Ago Waterfront Landmark," October 23, 2020.

Barnes, John. *Neon Road Trip*. Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2020.

Barrows, Naraelle, et al, "Aurora Avenue: Highway Culture in Transition," University of Washington (unpublished paper for CHID 270), March 15, 2008, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks>

Beck, Katherine, "Elephant Care Wash (Seattle)," HistoryLink.org Essay 21172, January 20, 2021.

Bellis, May, "The History of Neon Signs," ThoughtCo., February 3, 2019, <http://inventors.about.com/od/qstartinventions/a/neon.htm>

Berger, Knute, "Auto Reverie: The daze of Seattle's first cars," *Crosscuts*, October 8, 2013, pp. 7-8.

BOLA Architecture + Planning, "KING Broadcast Building Landmark Nomination," November 2014, p. 7

Campbell, Toni, "Ten Artists Who Defined the Medium," *Artland*, ca. 2019, <https://magazine.artland.com/neon-art-ten-artists-who-defined-the-medium/>

City of Seattle

Seattle City Light, "Powerlines" (newsletter), August 9, 2016.

Seattle Municipal Archives, <https://www.seattle.gov/cityarchives/search-collections/digital-archives>

Crowley, Walt, HistoryLink.org

"Twin T-Ps Restaurant, Early Roadside Attraction, Opens March 13, 1937, Essay 2890, Dec. 15, 2000.

"South Lake Union: The Evolution of a Dream," Essay 4250, June 8, 2003.

Dorpat, Paul, DorpatSherrardLamont, Seattle Now and Then

"The Igloo," Seattle Now and Then, September 5, 2009.

"Where's the Beef," June 11, 2011.

"The Arabian Theater," October 27, 2012

"The Signal Station on Aurora, 1929," March 16, 2013.

"Aurora Avenue," March 28, 2018.

Elephant Car Wash, <https://www.elephantcarwash.com/>

Elliott, Gwendolyn, "Western Neon Celebrates 33 Years Lighting Up Seattle with a New Art School," *Seattle Magazine*, May 2018, <https://seattlemag.com/arts-and-culture/western-neon-celebrates-33-years-lighting-seattle-new-art-school>

Friends of the Market, <https://www.friendsofthemarket.net/> accessed November 21, 2020).

Garfield, Leonard. "Why There Are So Many Hotels on Aurora Avenue," *Seattle PI Blog*, July 27, 2009. <http://blog.seattlepi.com/thebigblog/2009/07/27/why-are-there-so-many-motels-on-aurora-avenue/>

Holden, Brad

"Seattle's Queen of Neon: Meet the designer of the city's most iconic signs – from the Elephant Car Wash to Dick's Drive-In," *Seattle Times Pacific Northwest Magazine*, January 26, 2020.

Historic Seattle, "Restore the 'R' - Historic Rainier Been Sign," *Preservation in Progress*, July 28, 2012.

International Car Wash Assoc., "Industry Information," <https://www.carwash.org/industry-information>.

Jakle, John and Keith Sculle. *Signs in America's Auto Age: Signatures of Landscape and Place*. Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2004.

Johnson, Larry, "Firestone Auto Supply & Service Building Landmark Nomination," December 2015.

Jones, Rachel, HGTV Handmade

"From Empty Glass Tubes To Extreme High Voltage, Here's How a Neon Sign Is Made," <https://www.hgtv.com/design/make-and-celebrate/handmade/how-a-modern-neon-sign-is-made-pictures>

"The Art of Glass Bending with Will Kirtley of Seattle's Western neon," <https://www.hgtv.com/design/make-and-celebrate/handmade/the-handmade-art-of-glass-bending-pictures>," <https://www.hgtv.com/design/make-and-celebrate/handmade/the-handmade-art-of-glass-bending-pictures>

Kewshaw, Sarah, "In Seattle, Questions Arise About the Future of a Sign From the Past," *New York Times*, March 28, 2006.

King County Department of Assessments

GIS Maps, 1936, 2017, 2019.

Record Cards, Parcel No. 069700-0325 (Washington State Archives, Puget Sound Branch).

KOMO News, "Say goodbye to City Light's iconic neon sign," July 22, 2016.

Lange, Greg, "1st automobile arrives in Seattle on July 23, 1900," *HistoryLink.org* Essay 957, Feb. 26, 1999.

Liebs, Chester. *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Museum of History and Industry, Digital Photo Collection, <http://www.seattlehistory.org/mohai>

Nalewicki, Jennifer, "A Vibrant Tour of America's Neon Signs," *Smithsonian Magazine*, Feb. 28, 2020.

Neuwirth, Dave, "State of Glass" (video), Visit Seattle, <https://visitseattle.org/tv/videos/dylan-neuwirth/>

Nyberg, Folke and Victor Steinbrueck. "Denny Regrade: An Inventory of Buildings and Urban Design Resources," *Historic Seattle*, 1975.

Oak Ridge National Laboratory, "Transportation Energy Data Book, Ed. 33," July 2014, Tables 3.5 -3.6.

Ott, Jennifer, "Alaskan Way Viaduct Part 3," *HistoryLink.org* Essay 9978, December 3, 2011.

Peterson, David, "Eberharter Garage / Antique Liquidators, Seattle Landmark Nomination," October 22, 2014, p. 10.

Phelps, Myra L. *Public Works in Seattle: A Narrative History, The Engineering Department 1875-1975*, Seattle Engineering Department, 1975.

Rae, John B. *The American Automobile: A Brief History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Ribbat, Christoph. *Flickering Light: A History of Neon*. London: Reaktion Press, 2013.

Roadside Architecture.com, "Seattle Signs," <https://www.roadarch.com/signs/waseattle.html>

*Seattle Daily Times/Seattle Times* (available from the Seattle Public Library digital database)

"Pioneer Dealer Reviews History," March 14, 1920, p. 4.

"Doing Auto Row with Dudley Brown," November 17, 1940, p. 7.

"Auto-Washing Plant Under Way on Seventh," November 4, 1956, p. 3.

"Car-Wash Plant Being Remodeled," November 15, 1959, p. 44.

"Construction "Multi-million dollar expansion...remodeling of King Broadcasting," May 6, 1979.

"Business picks up for Seattle-Area carwash operators," August 14, 1984, p. 43-44.

"The Night Light – It's a Gas to Look at Neon," March 28, 1987, p. C1.

"Eye for Icons – Artist Memorializes Local," August 16, 1999, p. C1.

"Archie Anderson Put the Elephant in the Car Wash Name," May 16, 2001, p. B8.

"New Coat for neon pachyderm," October 15, 2010, p. B9.

Burbank, Meagan, "Demo permit filed for Elephant Car Wash," October 8, 2020, pp. 7-8.

Long, Katherine K., "Whimsical neon sign will go to MOHAI," October 9, 2020, p. A1.

Long, Katherine K., "Group pushes for Elephant ... sign to be saved on-site," October 15, 2020, p. 11.

Balk, Gene, "Seattle has finally reached peak car..." February 18, 2021.

*Seattle Post Intelligencer* (available from the Seattle Public Library digital database)

"Remodeling Job For S. End Carwash," November 11, 1959, p. 24.

"City Building Permits," April 11, 1967, p. 25.

"Patriotic bath for your auto," July 1, 1982, p. 39.

"Car-Wash Plant Bring Remodeled," November 15, 1959, p. 44.

"Elephant on Aurora Removed, March 25, 2009

Banel, Felix, "Seattle's Neon Signs Pierce the Winter Darkness," January 29, 2010.

"Photos: Looking Back at Aurora Avenue," March 15, 2018.



Sheridan, Mimi, "The P.I. Globe, City of Seattle Landmark Nomination," 2012.

Sheridan, Mimi, and Carol Tobin, "A Neighborhood History," Licton Springs Neighborhood Council website, [www.lictonspring.org/localin/history.html](http://www.lictonspring.org/localin/history.html).

#### Society of Commercial Archaeology

Jeremy Ebersole, "A Sight to Dwell Upon and Never Forget: Illuminating Strategies for Saving Neon Signs," March 19, 2021, <https://sca-roadside.org/may-19-zoom-event-jeremy-ebersole-a-sight-to-dwell-upon-and-never-forget-illuminating-strategies-for-saving-neon-signs/>

Dydia DeLyser and Paul Greenstein, "How Neon Signs Create Community" (video presentation), January 12, 2022, <https://sca-roadside.org/zoom-event-how-neon-signs-create-community/>

Len Davidson, "The Neon Museum of Philadelphia" (video presentation). September 9, 2020, <https://sca-roadside.org/zoom-event-len-davidson/>

Glaser, Petr, "Jumbo The Elephant," *SCA Journal*, Fall 2018, Vol. 36, No. 2.

Towne, Douglas, "Size Does Matter! – SCA Member Produces 'Giant' Documentary," *SCA Road Notes*, Winter 2004, Vol. 12, No. 4.

Stein, Alan J. "The Igloo ..." HistoryLink.org Essay 1162, August 12, 2002.

U.S. Department of Energy, "Fact #841: Vehicles per Thousand People" and "Vehicles per Thousand People in the United States, 1900–2012," October 6, 2014.

U.S. Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation, "Motor Vehicle Registrations by Years, 1900-1995, National Total and Washington State," April 1997.

Wedgewood in Seattle History Blog, "Fremont's Elephant" in, June 1, 2019, <https://wedgewoodinseattlehistory.com/2019/06/01/fremonts-elephants/>

Weaver, Lindsey, et al and Historical Research Associates, Inc. "Along the Row": The Growth of Seattle's Automobile Dealerships from 1900–1969," September 3, 2019. pp. 49, 53, 54.

Wolfe, Tom, "Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can't Hear You! Too Noisy)," *Esquire*, February 1, 1964.

Wright, Dorothy, and Angela Moor, "Fabulous Las Vegas, NRHP Nomination," October 2008.

Yesco, "The Neon Story," in *N* magazine, 2015, quoted in *Yesco News*, 07.13.2015, <https://www.yesco.com/2015/07/13/the-neon-story/>

#### **Interviews**

Kathleen Wolff, Beatrice Haverfield's daughter and Sue Rosenfield (Bea Haverfield's granddaughter) and Brad Holden, between September 12, 2019, and October 20, 2019.

Archie and Eldon Anderson family members, Adrian Anderson, Carmen Bolton, Rich Fromme and Lana Weed with Marissa Tsaniff, January 7, 2022.

Dylan Neuwirth, Western Neon, with Susan Boyle and Marissa Tsaniff, January 13 and 19, 2022.

## 5. ILLUSTRATIONS

<u>Figure Number</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Page</u>
<b>Current Photos</b>		
Figures 1 – 3.	The current sign, at Western Neon	26-28
Figures 4 – 12.	Detail views and restoration	29-32
Figures 13 – 15.	The prior setting, 616 Battery Street at Denny Way	33-34
Figures 16 – 17.	Photo mock-up and map of site in the Denny Regrade	34
<b>The Design</b>		
Figure 18.	Design drawing with restoration notes, 2021	35
Figure 19.	Portion of the original 1951 design sketch	35
<b>Original Elephant Car Wash Locations</b>		
Figure 20.	The 4 <sup>th</sup> Avenue S location and sign in 2022	36
Figure 21.	The Battery Street location, ca. 1959	36
Figure 22.	King County Assessor’s property record card	37
Figures 23 & 24.	Historic photos of the car wash operation, 1965	37
Figures 25 & 26.	The companion sign in 2007 and at night in 2019	38
<b>Beatrice Haverfield, the Designer</b>		
Figure 27.	Portrait of Bea Haverfield, ca. 1935	39
Figure 28.	Ivar’s sign, a ca. 1947 design script	39
Figure 29.	An original design sketch, ca. 1951	39
Figures 30 & 31.	Seattle neon sign studios, 1947	40
<b>The Anderson Brothers, Their Car Wash Business &amp; Symbolic Elephant</b>		
Figure 32.	Anderson family portrait	41
Figure 33.	Eldon Anderson’s patent drawing, automated equipment	41
Figure 34.	The cartoon elephant at night	42
Figure 35 – 37.	Other elephant signs	42
<b>Historic Neon Signs in Seattle</b>		
Figures 38 – 40.	Historic wall and roof-mount signs	43
Figures 41 – 45.	Neon signs throughout Seattle	44-45
Figures 46 – 49.	Preserved neon signs	46
Figures 50 & 51.	The landmark PI Globe	47
Figures 52 & 53.	Roosevelt Hotel rooftop sign	48
Figure 54 & 55.	Auto-related neon signs	49
Figures 56 – 58.	Pike Place Market signs	50
Figures 59 – 62.	Seattle City Light’s klieg, neon, and LED signage	51
<b>20<sup>th</sup> Century Auto Culture &amp; Roadside Attractions</b>		
Figure 63.	Maps, Seattle’s auto rows, 1900 – 1969	52
Figures 64 –70.	Aurora Avenue / Highway 99 and its roadside architecture	53-55
Figures 71 – 78	The endurance of roadside designs	56-57

### Current Photos

Below and the following seven pages contain photos from January 13, 2022, that show the sign undergoing restoration at the studio of Western Neon, Seattle. (Susan Boyle, BOLA).

### The Sign at Western Neon



Figure 1. Above, the sign front, which faced toward the street, on a temporary support frame.





Figure 2. Above, the back side of the sign, which has text and graphics without neon tubing.



Figure 3. Above, oblique view showing the edge of the sign cabinet and the front.

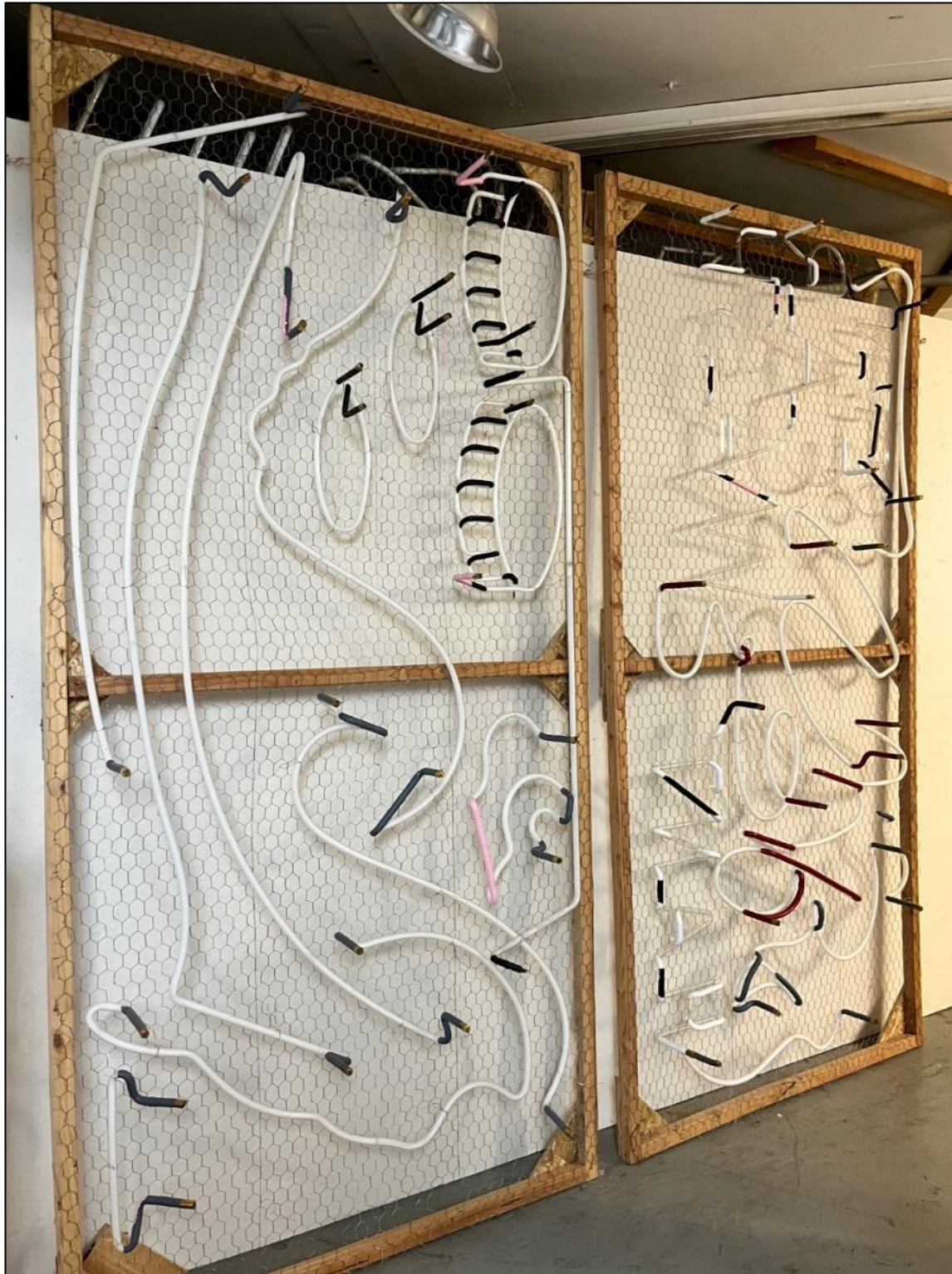




Figures 4-7. Detail Views: the cabinet back with painted areas (upper right), and front with the neon tubing (upper left before completed restoration and installation of neon-filled glass tubes, and below with neon tubes installed).







**Figure 8.** The tubes, mounted on a temporary support, and undergoing in-kind replacement and repair.





Figure 9. Above, detail view of the neon tube for elephant's pillbox hat on a temporary support.

Figure 10. Below, testing the tube light color on the sign's eyebrow piece.







Figure 11 Left, the full scale template for the neon tube letters

Figure 12. Below, the tube bending process.





The Prior Setting

Figures 13 & 14. Above and below, the 2017 County Assessor's map and aerial photo of the original triangular-shaped site of the former Elephant Car Wash shows its relationship with 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues and vehicle-access to nearby Aurora Avenue N/Highway 99. The two elephant signs were placed at the highly visible north and south corners of the site. North is oriented up. (King County GIS).





### The Denny Regrade Location

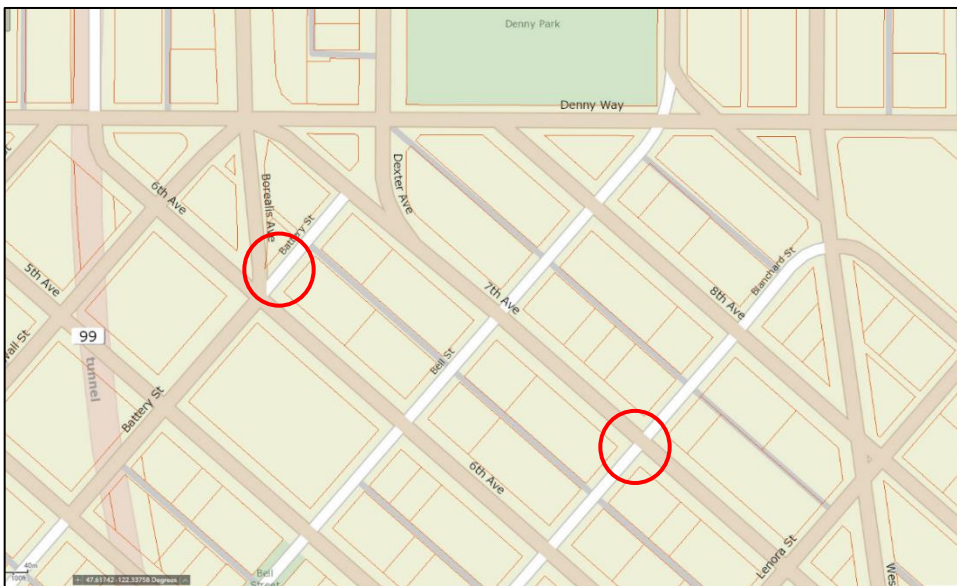


**Figure 15.** Left a similar aerial photo to the prior figure, this one from 2019, showing how the site context changed with completion of the new Highway 99 Battery Street tunnel and re-routing of access onto Aurora /Highway 99 (King County GIS). As a result, there were fewer vehicles directed to the car wash site.



**Figure 16.** Left, a photo mock-up showing how the car wash signs might be displayed at a new location as a privately-owned public art on an open plaza. (Cushing Terrell, 05.21.2021).

**Figure 17.** Below left, the potential reinstatement site at the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Blanchard Street is approximately three blocks southeast of the original sign location (King County Assessor GIS Map, 2019). North is oriented up on the plan.







Original Elephant Car Wash, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue & Battery Street Locations



**Figure 20.** Left, a current photo of the original location on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue S near Forest Street. This location ceased operation during the pandemic. (Susan Boyle, January 13, 2022).

**Figure 21.** Below aerial view of the original car wash property at 616 Battery Street, looking northwest on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue with the sign in the background (MOHAI 1986.5.17435.3).



<b>FOLO</b> 2155 <b>PERMIT NO.</b> 419224 147025 <b>DATE</b> 9-26-56 11-24-59		<b>ADDITION</b> W.N. BELLS 6TH Section 31 Twp. 25 Range 4 Ewm. Block W Lot or 16,78 Less part for st. Tax Lot Tract Address 2405 - 7TH AVE	
Fee Owner <b>A.D.V.E. INC</b> Architect Condition of Exterior <u>G</u> Interior <u>C</u> Foundation <u>G</u> Floor Plan: Good. Accept <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> .Good.			
<b>USE</b> <u>CAR WASH</u> No. Stories <u>1</u> No. Rooms <u>6</u> Basement No. Offices <u>2</u> No. Apartments 1 rm. <input type="checkbox"/> 2 rm. <input type="checkbox"/> 3 rm. <input type="checkbox"/> 4 rm. <input type="checkbox"/> 5 rm. <input type="checkbox"/> 6 rm. <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>ROOF CONSTRUCTION</b> Frame Lam. <input type="checkbox"/> Mill Construction Rein. Concrete <u>ROOF AWLERS</u> No. Trusses <u>10</u> <u>3-15</u> Wood <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Steel <input type="checkbox"/> <b>ROOFING MATERIAL</b> Tar and Gravel Or <u>U.</u>	<b>FLOOR FINISHES</b> Fir <input type="checkbox"/> Maple <input type="checkbox"/> Oak <input type="checkbox"/> 2"x8" T&G Lino. <input type="checkbox"/> 3"x8" T&G Cement Terrazzo Raecolith Tile	Tile <input type="checkbox"/> Lino. <input type="checkbox"/> Baths <input type="checkbox"/> Fl. <input type="checkbox"/> Walls Sq. Ft. Floors Sq. Ft. Walls Lin. Ft. Dr. Bdn. Sq. Ft. Floors Sq. Ft. Walls Lin. Ft. Dr. Bdn. Kit's <input type="checkbox"/> Fl. <input type="checkbox"/> Walls
<b>TYPE OF CONSTRUCTION</b> Frame <input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Double <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinary Masonry Mill Construction Class A Rein. Con. Stru. Steel and Con. Tile <input type="checkbox"/> Brick Con. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rein. Con. Good <input type="checkbox"/> Med. <input type="checkbox"/> Cheap <input type="checkbox"/>	Date Built <u>1956</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Finished <input type="checkbox"/> Unfinished <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Remodeled Effective Age <u>      </u> Years Future Life <u>      </u> Years Dep. for Cond. <u>      </u> Dep. for Ob. <u>      </u> Dep. for Ex. <u>      </u> Total <u>1070</u>	<b>PLUMBING</b> No. Fixtures <u>7</u> Toilets <u>3</u> Tub, Leg or Fern. <u>3</u> Basins, Bat. Sinks Urinals Showers (Tub) (Stall) Laundry Trays H. W. Tank Fl. Drains <input type="checkbox"/> Sprink. Sys. No. <u>      </u> Hds.	
<b>FOUNDATION</b> Mud Sills Post and Pier Brick Concrete <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pile	Inset photo showing car wash building and sign installation (Puget Sound Regional Archives).	<b>HEATING</b> Elec. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Slave Pipelina Furnace Gravity H. A. Air Cond. Fan Suspended Gas. Hot Water Steam Heat Hot Water Oil Burner	
<b>BASEMENT</b> <u>NO</u> Full <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Sub-Basement Size Garage <input type="checkbox"/> No. Cars Floors Plastered Living Rooms Service Rooms	Ins. <input type="checkbox"/> Freight Auto. <input type="checkbox"/> Elec. Man. <input type="checkbox"/> Hyd. Man.	Treated Pim, Timb Untreated Treated Pim only Average Length Paved	Knob & Tube Flex. Cable Conduit Power Wiring Range Wiring No. Outlets
<b>EXTERIOR WALL CONST.</b> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Double <input type="checkbox"/> 2" x 4" Stud Walls 2" x 6" Stud Walls Brick Walls Brick with Pilasters Concrete Walls Con. with Pilasters Tile Walls Rein. Con. Skel. Filler Walls	<b>INTERIOR WALLS</b> Stud and Plaster Lam. <input type="checkbox"/> Plastered Plywood Ceiled Plaster Board <u>CLCS</u> Painted Stain <input type="checkbox"/> Varnish Kalsomine Whitewashed Unfinished	<b>C. H.</b> B 1 2 3 4 5 6 7	<b>GROUND FLOOR AREA</b> <u>4107</u> <b>TOTAL FLOOR AREA</b> <u>221</u> 20' ROOF 20' STAIR LUNGE
Inset photo showing car wash operation and sign in 1965 (MOHAI 1986.5174351, 1986.57435.2).		Inset photo showing car wash operation and sign in 1965 (MOHAI 1986.5174351, 1986.57435.2).	

Historic Views of the Car Wash

Figure 22. Left, the King County Assessor's property record card with a photo from April 19, 1960, showing the original car wash building and sign installation (Puget Sound Regional Archives).

Figures 23 & 24. Inset photos, views of the car wash operation and sign in 1965 (MOHAI 1986.5174351, 1986.57435.2).





### The Companion Sign

**Figure 25.** Left, a view looking southwest at the large companion sign at the north end of the car wash site, September 14, 2007 (Joe Mabel, photographer, Wikimedia Commons).

**Figure 26.** Below, a view looking northwest at the larger companion sign at night, 2019 (Erika Schultz, photographer, *Seattle Times*).





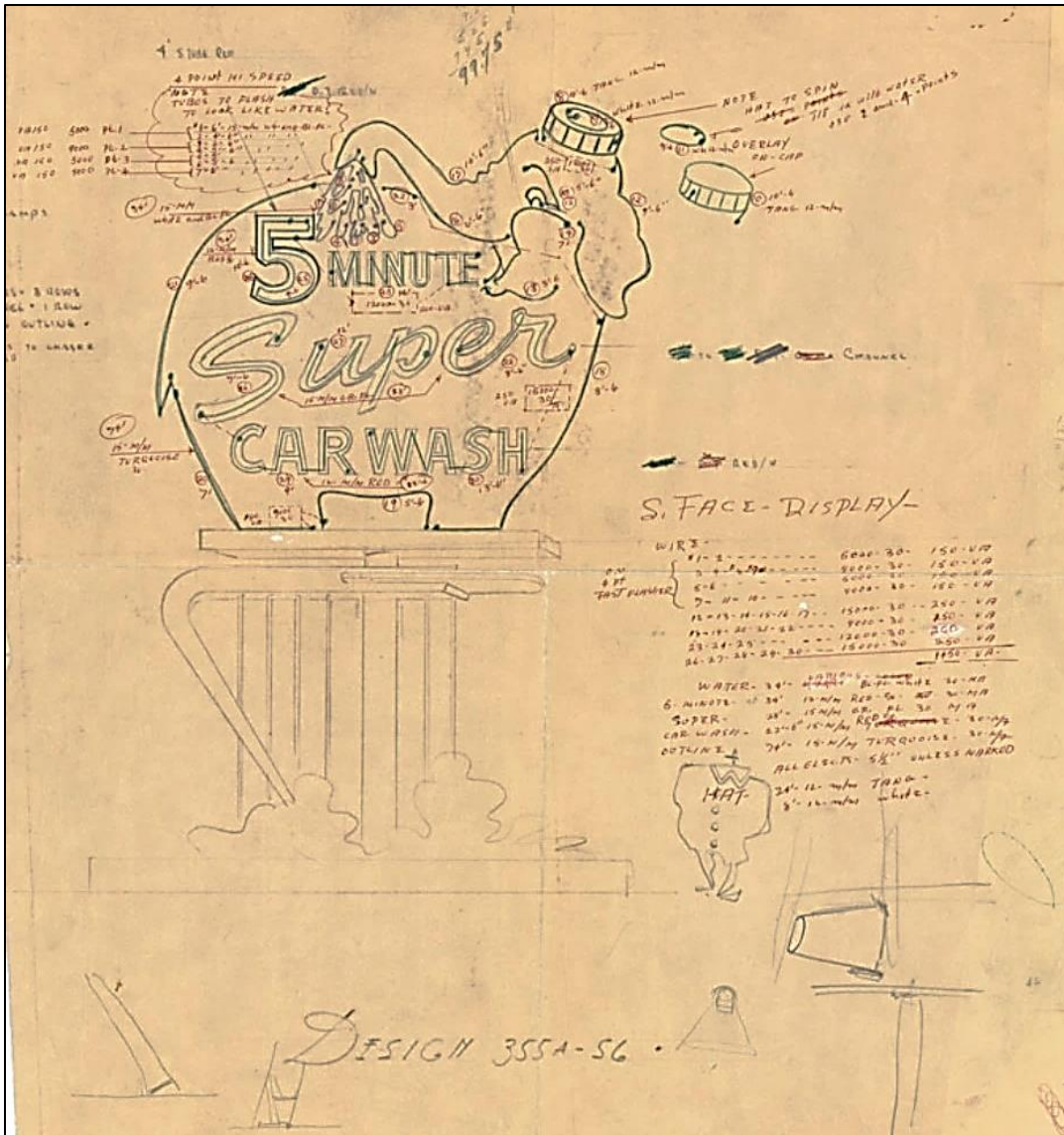


**The Original Designer, Beatrice Haverfield**

**Figure 27.** Left, portrait of Bea Haverfield as a young woman.

**Figure 28.** Right, one of her signature script signs from 194. (*Seattle Times*, January 26, 2020).

**Figure 29.** Below, an original sketch of the elephant car wash sign (Photo and sketch courtesy Kathleen Wolff).





Neon Sign Studios



Figures 30 & 31.  
Below, two views of  
an unnamed neon sign  
workshop in 1947  
(Webster & Stevens  
photos, MOHAI  
1983.10.166191 &  
1983.166191.5

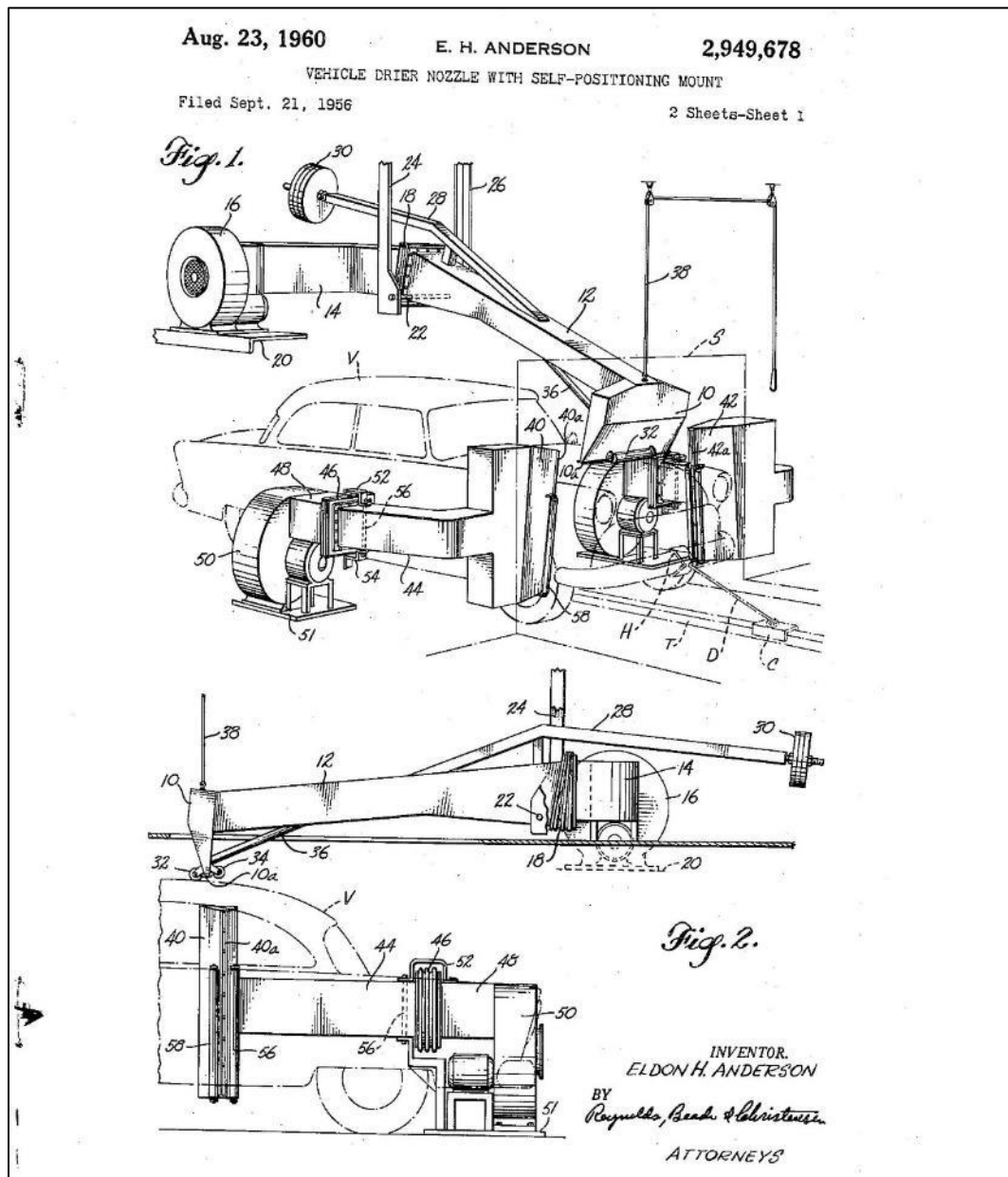




### The Anderson Brothers & Their Car Wash Business

**Figure 32.** Left, a portrait photo of the Anker Anderson family with Eldon seated on the far left, Dean seated on the far right, and Dean standing third from the left, with their siblings and parents (Photo courtesy the Anderson family).

**Figure 33.** Below, drawing for one of the patents for automated car wash equipment invented by Eldon Anderson (Patent drawing courtesy of the Archie Anderson family).



The Cartoon Elephant & Other Elephant Signs



**Figure 34.** Top, a nighttime photo of the cartoon-like sign (Felix Banel, My Northwest, February 2020). The use of an elephant symbol was conceived by Archie Anderson, the car wash co-owner.

**Figures 35.** Above left, the sign at the Rancho Mirage Car Wash. Archie Anderson’s son-in-law established this California business in the mid-1960s. This sign’s design is attributed to Beatrice Haverfield (IMG 7769).

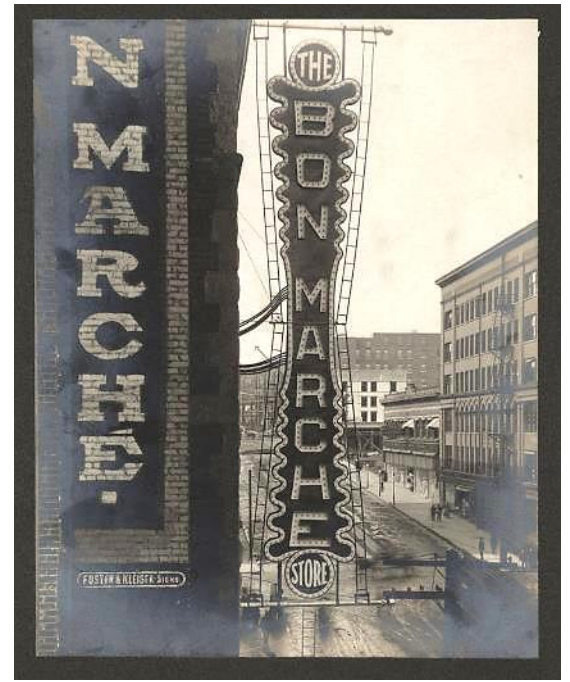
**Figures 36.** Above right, a similar current sign at another Puget Sound Elephant Car Wash locations (Elephant Carwash.com).

**Figure 37.** Right, the friendly neon elephant sign itself has been adopted by other entities, such as Seattle Children’s Research Institute, for the lobby of its building on Westlake Avenue N.





Historic Wall and Roof-Mount Signs in Seattle



**Figure 38.** Above left, a back (street) view from 1937 looking northwest at the Port of Seattle sign at the Bell Street Pier (Pier 66) (Port of Seattle, cited in Banel, My Northwest, February 2020).

**Figure 39.** Above right, the tall blade sign on the Bon Marche store at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Pike in 1905 (MOHAI 2009.20.142).

**Figure 40.** Below, the 1947 Grandma's Cookies sign was installed above 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue N overlooking the Gas Works in Wallingford and once was visible across Lake Union (MOHAI 1983.10.16528).



### Neon Signs in Throughout Seattle

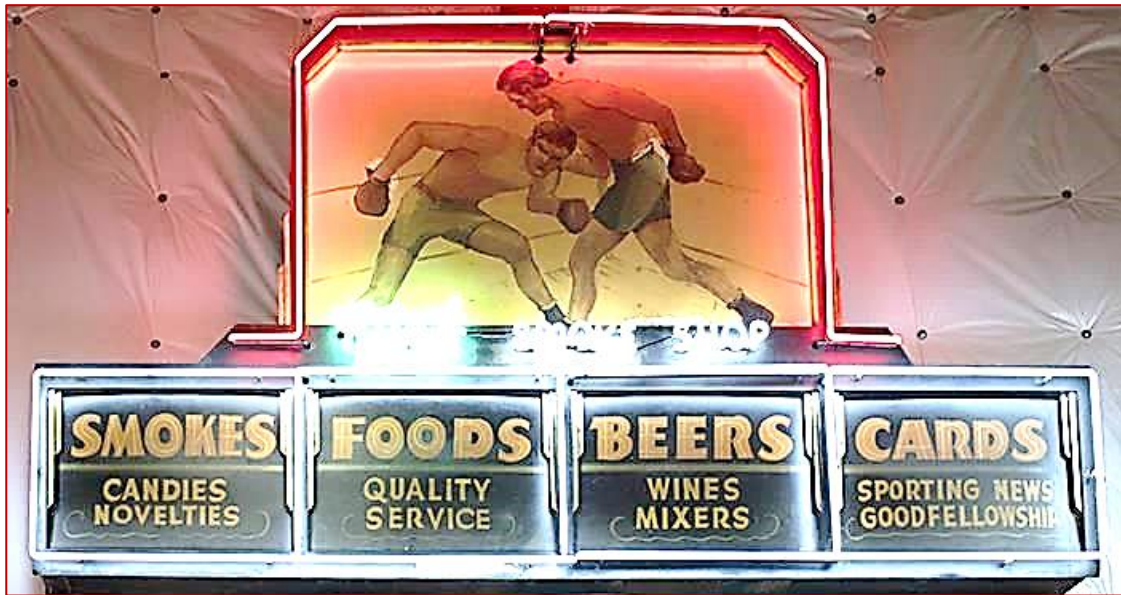


**Figure 41.** Above, the Ben Paris Restaurant at 4<sup>th</sup> & Pike Street in 1959 utilized neon and other illuminated signs. The business also offered sporting goods, a bar, pool hall and recreation (MOHAI 2002.46.10).



**Figure 42.** Left, the sign for the Bread of Life Mission dates from ca. 1945 when the non-profit shelter moved into its Pioneer Square facility. This sign has been retained. (Photograph by Joe Mabel, November 10, 2007, Wikimedia Commons).





**Figure 43.** Above, a ca. 1930 sign from the former Turf Restaurant on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Union Street advertising “Smokes – Food – Beer – Cards.” The *Stranger*, citing it noted, “The Turf is one of the last vestiges of old, seedy downtown Seattle, and as such, it is a civic treasure of a dive.” (Quote from MOHAI caption, Photo 2003.18.1).



**Figure 44.** Left, the 1934 sign for the famous Dog House Restaurant, demolished in ca 2000 (MOHAI 2000.21.22).

**Figure 45.** Below, the building and the lettered signage for Oberto Sausage, 1715 Rainier Avenue S, both date from the early 1950s (HistoryLink photo, 2017).



Preserved Neon Signs



**Figure 46.** Above left, the original 1952 Wonder Bread sign was an example of a rooftop scaffold type. This photo shows the sign after it was salvaged, rebuilt, and installed above a new building (Kewshaw, March 28, 2006).

**Figure 47.** Above right, the 1994 Edgewater “E” sign replaced an earlier scaffold sign (Edgewater Hotel)

**Figure 48.** Below left, the historic Noodle Bowl neon sign at S Main and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the Chinatown-International Historic District. The sign once illuminated steam rising from the bowl (Joe Mabel 2009 photographer, Wikimedia Commons).

**Figure 49.** Below right, the rotating Rainier “R” sign dates originally from 1952. It rotated originally, and featured incandescent bulbs as well as neon. This photo shows it after recent repairs (MOHAI 1999.64.53)





### The Landmark PI Globe



**Figure 50.** The neighborhood setting for the Elephant Car Wash in 1953 as visible in this aerial photo looking toward the southwest at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Battery Street in 1953. This photo shows the prominent globe sign atop the *Post Intelligencer* printing plant and headquarters. At this time, the downtown streets operated with two-way traffic. The future location of the Elephant Car Wash in 1956 was at the lower left, after the rectangular block was reconfigured into a triangle to facilitate access onto Aurora Avenue N (MOHAI 1986.5.8878).



**Figure 51.** Left, the neon globe at night (*Seattle Post Intelligencer*). The globe was placed atop the Moderne style building at its original location, and later moved to an Elliott Bay building. It was donated to MOHAI, and is a designated Seattle landmark in 2017.



### The Roosevelt Hotel Rooftop Sign



**Figures 52. & 53.** Above, a recent photo of the scaffold type neon sign at the rooftop of the Roosevelt Hotel / Hotel Theodore, which dates originally from 1929 (Downtown Seattle Association News, April 30, 2018). Below, a recent photo of the same sign at night (TripAdvisor, n.d.)





#### Auto Related Neon Signs

**Figure 54.** Left, a restored sign for Mac's, a Ballard shop, dates from 1949. Neon signage was used frequently by auto dealerships and associated businesses. (Rachel Jones, photographer, KOMO, "Electric Feel: Seattle's Best Neon")

**Figure 55.** Below, Campbell Neon designed and manufactured the Bardahl sign, installed above the manufacture's Ballard facility in 1952. "Originally the red neon alternated between 'Add Bardahl Oil' and 'Add it to your Gas,' with the sequential white neon rings providing the illusion of an approaching car headlights." (Above, *Seattle P.I.*, "Neon Signs Pierce the Winter Darkness," January 29, 2010. Quote and lower photo from Roadside Architecture.com, "Seattle Signs," <https://www.roadarch.com/signs/waseattle.html>)





### Pike Place Market Historic Signage

Figures 57 & 58. Below, signs from in Historic District include the largest one on between the Leland Building and Outland Hotel, and Public Market sign above the Arcade, from 1928 -1930. Others are the City Fish sign (1918), Farmers Market sign (1930), Loback Meat Company sign (1947, replicated in ca 1985). (Friends of the Market)





**Seattle City Light Kleig, Neon & LED Signage**

**Figure 59.** Left, In 1921 the completion of the Lake Union Steam Plant was celebrated with full-height lighting and klieg lights that celebrate the association of illumination with urbanism (Seattle City Light).



**Figures 60 & 61.** Left and lower left the original roof-top neon sign above City Light's South Seattle Service Center. The 1920s sign, made of 18 separate letters, had sets facing west and east. In the 1980s it was replaced.

**Figure 62.** Directly below, the current LED sign. "The utility determined [replacement of the neon] was needed because they outlived their expected life span and became hard to maintain. Using LED lighting will save energy and save money while maintaining the historical look of the signs." (*Seattle Times*, March 28, 2006).





Seattle's 20<sup>th</sup> Century Auto Culture

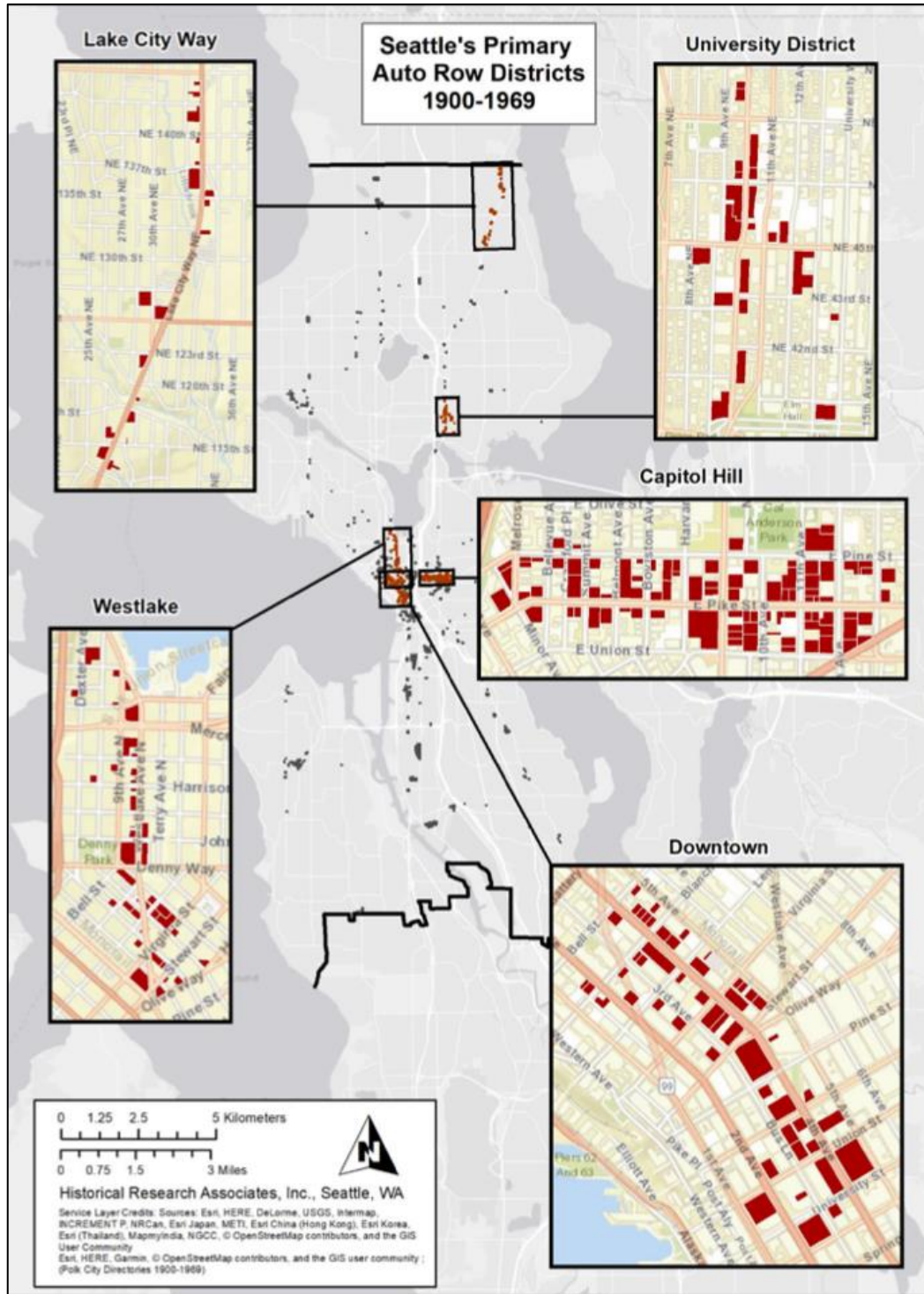


Figure 63.

Above, this collection of maps identifies Seattle's auto dealerships and its "Auto Row" areas from 1900 to 1969. Those in the downtown area largely date from 1900-1920, while most those others near the Elephant Car Wash, along Westlake Avenue or in the Denny Triangle area, were built later. (Weaver and Historical Research Associates, Inc., "Along the Row," September 3, 2019, p. 49)

Aurora Avenue / Highway 99 and Its Roadside



Figures 64 & 65. Above, two views of Aurora Avenue N/Highway 99 in 1940. (SMA 54488 and 54805)  
Figures 66 & 67. Below, views from 1952 looking north from 75<sup>th</sup> Street and Harrison Street (MOHAI).





**Figures 68 & 69.** Highly stylized roadside buildings along Highway 99: Left, the Arabian Theater (1925), 7610 Aurora Avenue N.) Below, the Signal Gas Station at 80<sup>th</sup> Street (1929). Both buildings remain and have been adapted for new uses. (Dorpat, Now and Then, “The Arabian Theater,” October 27, 2012, and “Signal Gas Station on Aurora,” March 16, 2013.).



**Figure 70.** Left the former Twin Teepee's Restaurant, at 7201 Aurora Avenue N. (1937-demolished 2001). The concrete frame structure featured Northwest Coast Indian-inspired interior murals.





Illumination along Highway 99:  
**Figure 71.** Left, the Aurora Bridge opened in 1932, originally illuminated by a series of classical style light standards.



**Figure 72.** Left, Dag's drive-in opened at 800 Aurora Avenue N in 1955, in a highly glazed Modern style building with signage and lighting to draw customers in cars. (Both photos, Dorpat, 2018)



**Figure 73.** Below, current street lighting and luminous signage on Highway 99 (2006)



The Endurance of Roadside Designs



Figures 71 & 72. The three-dimensional elephant at 8800 Aurora Avenue N dates from 1938 when the shop owner commissioned the sculpture from a local mason to remind customers to never forgets (to buy flowers) Left, its removal for restoration by the current property owner, Aurora Rents (*Seattle P.I.*, March 25, 2009) Below, its reinstallation (Wedgewood, June 1, 2019)

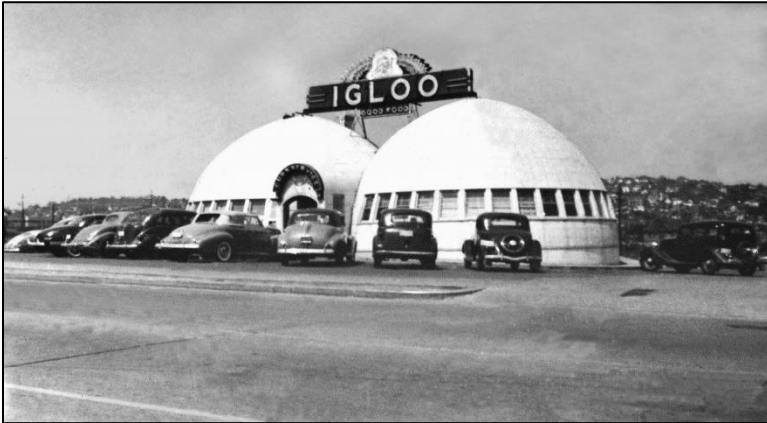


Figures 73 & 74. Below, the Puetz driving range and pro shop opened originally near 125<sup>th</sup> Street in 1945 when surrounding development was sparse. It was identified by its unique neon sign. (UWLSC)



Figure 75. Left, By 1976 the varied signage on Aurora Avenue N was considered disorderly and distracting by Modernist urban designers and city planners. This same sense of aesthetics and control of pop culture expression influenced federal highway beautification programs.





**Figures 76 & 77.** Above, photos from 1942 and 1954 of the imaginative designed Igloo, reportedly the city's first drive I, which opened at 6<sup>th</sup> and Wall Street off Aurora Avenue (Dorpat, September 5, 2009).

**Figure 78.** Below, a recent innovative design, the Amazon Spheres (Joe Mabel, photographer, October 21, 2018, Wikimedia Commons)

