

Indigenous Lake Union and Environs

Adopted from *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing Over Place* by Coll Thrush, 2008. University of Washington Press.

In the early twentieth century, anthropologists Thomas Talbot Waterman and John Peabody Harrington collected place names from Duwamish elders in Seattle and on area reservations. Beginning in the later part of the century, elders, language teachers, linguists, and others have done their best to recover those names, translate them when meanings weren't given, and make decisions about how to write them, since Lushootseed (Puget Sound Salish) did not originally have a written form. What you see here is the result of several layered attempts to uncover the meanings of these names: the translation and orthographic work of Vi Hilbert, Zalmay Zahir, Jay Miller, and Nile Thompson; the historical research of Coll Thrush and David Buerge; and Michael Evans' assistance with translating Nile Thompson's orthography to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is more commonly used in Lushootseed today. We have included Thompson's orthography, followed by its IPA equivalent. This is an imprecise process, made more difficult by the long, troubled history of Native-settler relations in Puget Sound, in which some aspects of languages like Lushootseed, and some of the knowledge contained within them, were often lost.

1) Serviceberry QWulástab

q̣ʷəlastəb - Serviceberry, Shot Berry

Waterman's "small bush with white flowers and black berries" is a clear reference to serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), whose wood was used for gaming pieces and whose berries were eaten either fresh or dried.

2) Outlet gWáXWap (lit. 'leak (at) bottom end')

gʷaχʷap * Similar to the word for *drip* with ending for bottom.

This was the outlet of a stream, known to settlers as Ross Creek, that emptied Lake Union into Salmon Bay and was the passageway of several runs of salmon (chum, pink, Chinook and Coho).

3) Thrashed Water sCHaxW7álqoo

čax³wadq^{wu}? – Club or hit with stick

Or

Covered Water scHooxW7álqoo

sčux^{w?}alq^{wu} *

People drove fish into this narrow, brushy stream by thrashing the water with sticks. The stream now flows in a pipe somewhere under the streets of the Fremont neighborhood.

4) Extended from the Ridge sTácHeech

s¹tačič *

Now the site of Gas Works Park, this point was described by Waterman's informants as leaning against the slope of the Wallingford neighborhood like a prop used to hold up part of a house.

5) Prairie báqWab

babq^wab - Prairie

Long before white settlers envisioned a canal linking Lake Washington and Lake Union indigenous people used this corridor to travel between the backcountry and the Sound.

8) Marsh

spáhLaXad

spałx̄ad – March, tide flat, level field

The wetlands on the south shore of Portage Bay must have been a fine place for hunting waterfowl. Cheseeahud or “Lake Union John” owned several acres here from at least 1880 until 1906, a fact commemorated in a “pocket park” at the foot of Shelby Street by a plaque and depictions of salmon by an artist of the Puyallup Tribe.

9) Jumping over Driftwood

saxWabábatS (lit. ‘jump over tree trunk’)

sax^{wə}babac – Jump, leap off – solid object

The Lake Union shoreline was thick with logs here. A similar place name, Jumping Down (saxWsaxWáp), was used for a Suquamish gaming site on Sinclair Inlet across Puget Sound; that name refers to a contest in which participants vied to see who could jump the furthest off a five-foot-high rock.

10) Deep

sTLup

sł̄əp – Deep, beneath (surface)

This is a typically no-nonsense description of the place where the steep slope of Capitol Hill descends into the waters of Lake Union.

11) Trail to the Beach scHákWšHud (lit. ‘the foot end to the beach’)

čaʔkʷšəd – Located toward the water, seaward – foot,
lower leg

A trail from [23] below ended here. An elderly indigenous man named Tsetseguis, a close acquaintance of the David Denny family, lived here with his family in Seattle’s early years, when the south end of Lake Union was dominated by Denny’s sawmill.

12) Deep for Canoes TLupéélʔweehL

ǰəpalgʷiʔ – Deep, beneath (surface) – for canoes

While seemingly synonymous with [10] above, the subtle difference between the two place names in fact matters. Such distinctions were critical to correct navigation and the sharing of information. According to the maps created by the General Land Office in the 1850s, there was a trail near here that skirted the southern slope of Queen Anne Hill on its way to Elliott Bay.

13) Small Lake XáXuʔcHoo (lit. ‘small great-amount-of-water’)

ǰəǰəčuʔ – Diminutive of Lake (small Lake)

This is the diminutive form of the word used to denote Lake Washington (see [18]), in keeping with the lakes’ relative sizes.

14) Carry a Canoe

sxWátSadweehL

sx^wacəg^wiʔ – Lighten, carry a canoe

In 1854, pioneer leader Thomas Mercer visited Lake Union and envisioned a canal that would someday link the lake to Puget Sound and Lake Washington. In the 1860s, a settler named John Pike began digging a canal here by hand, and for a time there was a small log flume that connected the two lakes. None of this was based on new ideas; indigenous people had been crossing this isthmus for centuries, either carrying their canoes or shoving them along an intermittent creek that appeared when Lake Washington occasionally overflowed. Meanwhile, General Land Office surveys from the 1850s show a well-worn “Indian trail” just north of here, approximately where the Burke-Gilman Trail is now, and oral tradition cites another trail to the south. With all this traffic, then, one wonders if the idea of the “union” of lakes and sound was really Thomas Mercer’s after all.

15) Little Canoe Channel

shLoowééhL (lit. ‘little canoe hole’)

slu[?]wiʔ – Hole but not through it, in or for a canoe

This was an important town with at least five longhouses and a large fishing weir on Ravenna Creek. The remains of that weir were exposed when Lake Washington was lowered in 1916; any evidence of the town itself has long been obscured by development around today’s University Village shopping mall.

16) Dear Me!

ádeed

?adid(a) – a kin to ?áčeda, mild surprise, unfortunate

This small cove was an important gathering place to play slahal, the bone game; its name is an exclamation that must have echoed out over the water during many a session. Waterman's informant said that this place was "set aside" as a camping spot for Indians. This was most likely during the 1870s, when Henry Yesler operated a sawmill on the cove and would have needed all the workers he could get. The bone game sessions surely continued after a hard day's work in the mill.

17) Drying House

sHab7altxW

šabalʔtx^w – Drying house

Exposed to the sun and to winds off the lake, this point would have been an ideal place for drying salmon in open frame structures. Waterman noted that his Indian collaborators also referred to this place as Whiskey Point, perhaps a reference to the liquor obtained via the cash and contacts made at Yesler's mill.

18) Lake

XacH7oo (lit. 'great amount of water')

šăčuʔ - Lake

A generic term for large bodies of freshwater, XacH7oo gave its name to the Hachooamish or Lake Indians, a branch of the Duwamish proper who lived around the shores of Lake Washington. On some early maps of the area, this lake appears as "Lake Duwamish."

19) It Has Skate Fish baskWéékWee7hL

bəsk^{wi}?k^{wil} - ʃ^was Skate Fish

Skates, as a saltwater species, did not live in Lake Washington; this name more likely refers to the low, flat shape of the land here at what is now Madison Park.

20) Little Island stéécHee

stítčì - * sčəg^wucid –Current word for Island

Now the southern half of Foster Island in the Washington Park Arboretum, this was a cultural site associated with [15] above.

21) Baby Fathom stáhLahL

stáʔaʔ – Stretch, measure (from fingertip to fingertip

The fathom, or more correctly the width of an adult's outstretched arms, was a common unit of measurement in Puget Sound indigenous life. This diminutive version of 'fathom' could also mean 'niece' or 'nephew.'

22) Aerial Duck Net túqap (lit. 'blocked at bottom')

təqəp – Blocked, closed - bottom

This is a common place name in Puget Sound, referring to nets, strung between tall poles and used to catch waterfowl. This unique technology mystified British explorer George

Vancouver, who wrote that it was “undoubtedly, intended to answer some particular purpose; but whether of a religious, civil, or military nature, must be left to some future investigation.” Waterman was told that the ducks would be “started up” at Lake Union, and then caught in the net here. One of Harrington’s informants, Percival, had camped here regularly before the site was urbanized and recalled that a small creek ran year-round at the site. This place name can also describe someone who is constipated.

23) Little Prairie

babáqWab

babak^wab – Diminutive of prairie, little prairie

or

Large Prairie

báqWbaqWab

bak^wbak^wab – Reduplicated, plural prairies

Indian witnesses in a land claims case in the 1920s identified this place as the site of two longhouses, each 48 by 96 feet. The residents of these houses would have made good use of the large patches salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) that could be found here, either eating the fruit fresh or drying into cakes for the winter. Middens found along the shoreline here attest to the area’s importance as a shellfish-processing site as well. Settler John Bell staked his claim here, and until the early twentieth century, the Belltown shoreline was an important camping place for Native people including migrants from Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington’s outer coast.

24) Saltwater

XWulcH

ǰ^wəlč – Salt water

Theodore Winthrop's 1862 travel narrative *The Canoe and the Saddle* used the anglicized form of this word to denote both "Indian Whulgeamish and Yankee Whulgers" who lived along the Sound (correctly using the Whulshootseed change of cH to j before vowel-initial suffixes). In the century and a half since, this word for Puget Sound, spelled in various ways, has occasionally resurfaced, most notably in the well-known series of guidebooks profiling hikes and other excursions around the Sound published by *The Mountaineers*.

* - Word does not appear in Lushootseed dictionary.