

meet your neighbors

'Millionaires' Row' Still Has Elegance



Looking South From Tower

Capitol Hill's 14th Avenue East, once known as "Millionaires' Row" between Volunteer Park and Roy Street, was an elegant, detached neighborhood. An entrance gate at Roy Street sealed off the outer world, and shrubs were planted down the center of 14th Avenue. The view shown is south from the base of Volunteer Park's water tower.

By MARTY LOKEN

If the dignified, proud mansions on Capitol Hill's onetime "Millionaires' Row" could speak—what boasts they would make!

The Row, on 14th Avenue East between East Roy Street and the south side of Volunteer Park, is a fascinating collage of ornate metalwork, Oriental rugs, gold-framed paintings and fragile, high-backed chairs.

At the turn of the century, Millionaires' Row was an exclusive, detached neighborhood. An imposing gate at Roy Street sealed off the outer world. Shrubs were planted neatly down the center of 14th Avenue, which was privately owned.

The neighborhood was stately, beautiful—almost untouchable. It had class then, and it still does.

BARONS OF INDUSTRY instructed teams of carpenters, bricklayers and decorators to "pull all the stops" when homes were built on Millionaires' Row.

When all the stops were pulled, many magnates found themselves in 20-room mansions, complete with eight children, seven fireplaces, six bathrooms, five domestic aides, four horses, three tall oaks, two carriages and one gazebo.

The horses are gone today, but some of the carriage houses and gazebos still stand as reminders of the genteel past.

Millionaires' Row is a grand, irreplaceable strip. Many of the "stops out" homes, which cost upward of \$100,000 to erect 70 years ago, would cost \$400,000 to duplicate today—if they could be duplicated at all.

Today's glassed-in home, with its wall-to-wall plywoods and plastics, is relatively simple to build.

Costs and tastes today prohibit the installation of hand-carved stairway railings, Italian glass or heavy beams where 2-by-4's suffice.

ONE LONG-TIME RESIDENT of 14th Avenue, whose family has been in the same home since 1903, said she once "could see the Olympic Mountains, the Cascades and Mount Rainier" — all from the third floor of her stately white mansion. That was "before the trees grew so tall and other houses were built."

Her neighbors (with names like White, Stuart, Skinner, Eckstein, Burwell, Cobb and Schaefer) were "substantial, well-known people."

"Busses would come down our street, directing tourists to the rich people's houses," she said.

When President Harding visited Seattle July 27, 1923, Nathan Eckstein and other neighbors bought "the biggest flag in Seattle" as a welcoming banner. When the President's motorcade rolled through Millionaires' Row to greet neighbors in the well-heeled community, he must have been somewhat impressed.

There, draped across 14th Avenue between the Eckstein and Ederer mansions was a gigantic array of Stars and Stripes—perhaps the biggest he would ever see. The President, on the last leg of his nation-wide tour, died six days later in San Francisco.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD STILL HAS an elegant aura, but the millionaires have thinned out in recent decades.

The strip is still zoned residential, but apartment zoning threatens. Attempts to rezone Millionaires' Row have been made more than once. All, to date, have met loud shouts of disapproval.

The battle line today is drawn east to west across Roy Street — the Row's old south boundary. Apartments flourish south of the line, and residents of the Row hope they'll "stay where they are."

Many mansions, too cumbersome for single families, have been converted into boarding houses.

Others, like the old Gorman House at 906 14th Av. E., have, for no small price, been remodeled into office-residences.

Charles Metre and William Kramer, interior designers, purchased the former rooming house six years ago. Today the 20-room oldster is a showplace for their work.

"It looked like a turn-of-the-century mortuary before we started remodeling," said Metre, surveying the restoration job in his 18-by-40-foot living room.

"I remember wandering through the 20 rooms of disrepair just after the deal was consummated. I started to wonder whether I'd completely lost my mind..."

METRE, LIKE MANY of his neighbors, has an unexplainable attachment to older homes.

"I built a new house once and lived in it for a year," Metre said. "It didn't have the curse of many newer houses but it lacked the detail you find in these old places..."

Metre is convinced that apartment-zoned neighborhoods decay residentially, and he hopes his street will be spared. He explained:

"When a block is rezoned for apartments, the homeowners suddenly think everybody's going to rush in and

Metropolitan Seattle is an area of contrasts—a city of compact urban blocks blending into sprawling suburbs. An elongated puzzle of dissimilar parts, each area has a personality of its own. Who are the people who make up the metropolis and its neighboring areas? How do they view their own areas, and how does their community affect Seattle? What are their likes and dislikes, their problems? To find the answers, The Times sent Marty Loken, staff reporter, to Meet Your Neighbors.



Things Have Changed

Pietro Nelly, 87, set out on his daily four-mile walk down 14th Avenue East and through Volunteer Park. The former winemaker and grocery-store owner finds it hard to believe the changes in Seattle since his arrival in 1902.

DOWN THE STREET FROM NELLY, at 906 14th Av. E., is the carriage house of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Wright, Jr.

Wright, decorator in a women's-apparel store, purchased the onetime horse-and-carriage barn years ago, and moved into it last year. It was owned at one time by the Gorman family, who lived next door in Charles Metre's mansion.

"Our friends couldn't believe that we'd try to fix up a place like this," Mrs. Wright said.

"Before we started the remodeling job, the place was no more than a play area for stray dogs and cats." The restoration, an ambitious family project, will be completed by early summer.

buy their land... They stop improving their homes because they believe their property is the only thing anybody will want to buy.

"Before they know it, their neighborhood is run down, whether apartments are built or not..."

THE THREE-STORY HOME of Mr. and Mrs. Woolvin Patten, at 633 14th Av. E., is halved by an invisible line—the zoning border.

(East Roy Street, the boundary, dead-ends briefly at 14th Avenue East. The Patten home, facing the middle of Roy Street, theoretically is half apartment and half residential zoned.)

When the Pattens, native Georgians, moved to Seattle 18 years ago, they promptly visited a real-estate broker.

"We wanted to find a beautiful older home," Mrs. Patten said... Well, they misunderstood and took us around to see all the old places with broken windows."

Patten, an attorney, finally stumbled across their home while "just driving around."

Pietro Nelly, at 87 one of the neighborhood's oldest residents, lives in a "new" 17-year-old home at 708 14th Av. E.

Nelly, a retired winemaker and grocer of Italian descent, probably sees more of the area than his neighbors (he walks three to four miles a day—about 1,300 miles a year—through Volunteer Park and neighboring Capitol Hill blocks).

Nelly sailed to the United States in 1902 and migrated directly to Seattle.

"Ha! That was a good time, boy," Nelly said, slapping one fist on the other palm.

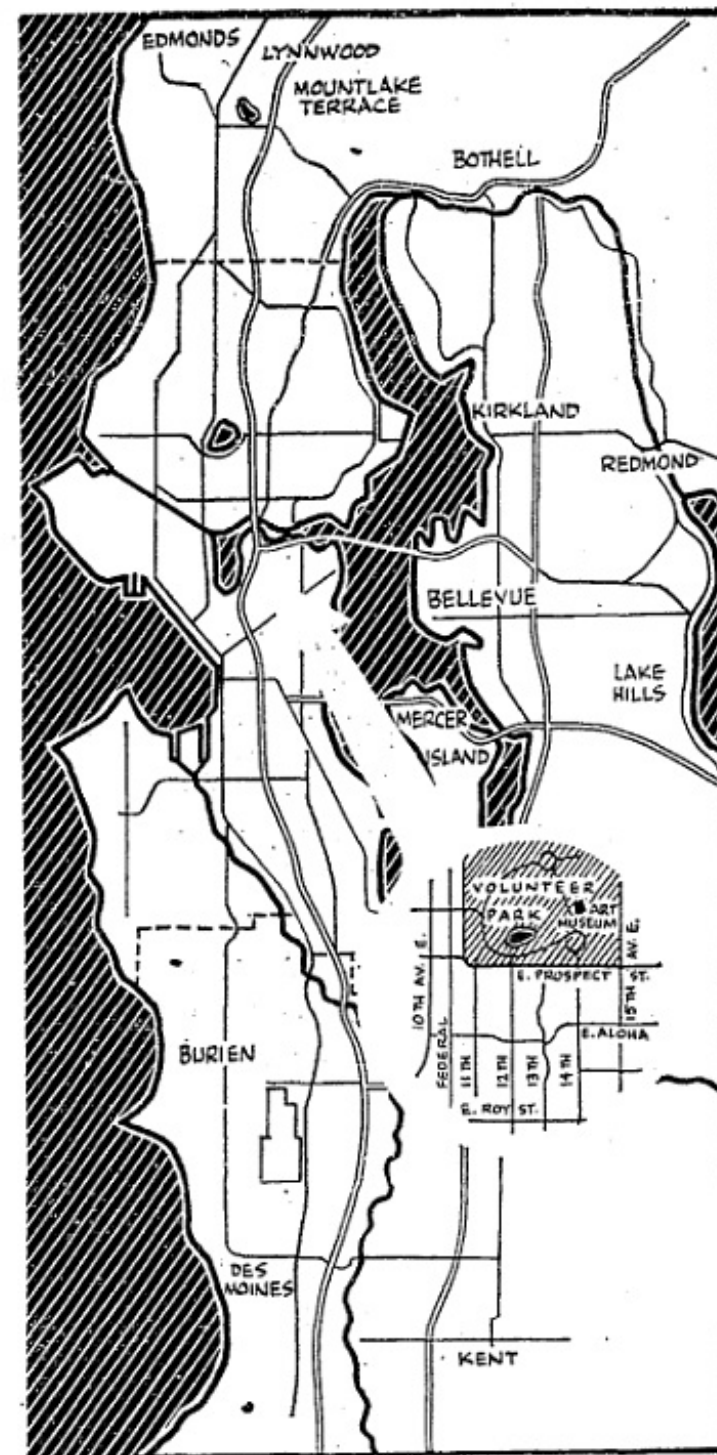
"But the times, they have changed so. You cannot imagine how they have changed... Now, I think they want to tear down some of these beautiful houses for apartments."

His face saddened. "In the United States, I think they do anything for the dollar," he said.



Their Home Is A Showplace

Charles Metre and William Kramer, interior designers, purchased the 20-room former boarding house at 906 14th Av. E. six years ago. Today it stands as a showplace for their work. "It looked like a turn-of-the-century mortuary before we started remodeling," said Metre.



Residential blocks adjoining Millionaires' Row are undergoing a rebirth of sorts, as younger couples with an ample supply of energy and children are drawn into the roomy older homes.

There is an intriguing, quaint charm to the dwellings, no matter what their condition. Some, like shipwrecks or ghost towns, have a strangely magnetic attraction.

TO MANY YOUNG COUPLES, they present a challenge.

"Wouldn't it be SOMETHING," says the young bride on a Sunday drive through Capitol Hill's tree-lined streets, "to fix up that old place!"

It can be SOMETHING when the elderly homes are renovated.

Dr. and Mrs. Christopher Williams of 938 13th Av. E. are perhaps typical of the "young renovators." Dr. Williams teaches pediatrics at the University of



More Elbow Room

Dr. and Mrs. Christopher Williams, of 938 13th Av. E., are representative of the neighborhood's "young renovators." The Williamses have found many bonuses in an older home—the biggest being elbow room for their three boys, Ben, 7; Bruce, 5, and Evan, 3.

Washington. Mrs. Williams, besides keeping up with three subteen boys, is choir director and organist at Trinity Episcopal Church.

She has noted two stages in the lives of her Capitol Hill contemporaries.

"In Stage 1, they buy a home in suburbia, as we did when we were married, and they LOVE doing lots of yard work."

"Then, in Stage 2, they get tired of all the extra work and driving, and move back into the city to buy a home with hardly any lawn..."

THE WILLIAMSES' SPACIOUS HOME is more than 50 years old, but loving care and buckets of paint have taken decades away.

Mrs. Williams rates Volunteer Park as one of the hill's prime assets.

"It's wonderful for the children, but it's also fun for us," she said.

"We can hear the summer park concerts from our house, but that's not all. On New Year's Eve, a very talented trumpet player was blowing 'Auld Lang Syne' from the top of the water tower."

The top-of-the-hill sector long has been regarded by outsiders as a place to retire: a quiet place with old-fashioned houses and nostalgic neighbors.

If that ever was the case, it isn't today.

The area is markedly homogeneous. Millionaires' Row, once exclusive, is now merely upper middlecrust. The surrounding blocks display a full spectrum of dwellers and dwellings.

If an increasing number of persons join the "Stage 2 rebellion" against suburbia, many older homes headed for oblivion will be given another chance.

That umpteenth coat of paint can work wonders.

NEXT WEEK: Life in a Richmond Highlands mobile-home park.