At the time of Ballard’s incorporation in 1889, it was the second largest city in the new state of Washington. Originally, Ballard Avenue was the central commercial district for the city and was filled with hotels, dry goods stores, taverns, and livery stables, all interspersed with residences. Just a block away was the bustling Salmon Bay waterfront where shingle and lumber mills flourished and set the pace for Ballard’s growth. In 1907 Ballard was annexed to the city of Seattle. It was not until the 1920s and 30s that many businesses moved to Market Street, ultimately fostering the decline of Ballard Avenue. During the 1970s, local residents anticipated the eventual destruction of Ballard Avenue and lobbied for landmark status. In 1976 Ballard Avenue was designated as a local and national historic district. We all now benefit from the new revival of Ballard Avenue, thanks to those forward-thinking preservationists.

We hope you enjoy this tour and in the process learn a bit of Ballard history!
Historic Ballard Walking Tour

1. The building features stone window lintels and sills, as well as a decorative brick cornice with metal cap piece, and was carefully restored in the 1980s. Typical of commercial buildings along Ballard Avenue, the upper-level of this structure once served as a hotel, providing rooms for fishermen and mill workers while the street level was occupied by grocers, meat markets and dry goods stores. This 1906 photograph shows the exterior of Peterson & Jenson's "The People's Store," which occupied the ground level when the Princess Hotel was upstairs.

2. Until about 1904, most of the buildings along Ballard Avenue were wood-frame structures. Originally this building was the home of the popular European Bakery; subsequently DiSalvo's, a "mom and pop" tavern, was here for thirty years. The building was remodeled in 1968 to reflect its original style.

3. The Portland Building. This structure is one of the best examples of decorative brick work on Ballard Avenue. Many long-standing businesses, such as Cascade Drug, Halverson's Dry Goods, and J.C. Penney occupied this building during Ballard Avenue's heyday. In the 1950s through 1970s the corner storefront was used as a tavern with various names, including The Cedar and The Buffalo. The building was painstakingly renovated in 1985.

4. This triangular corner building is distinguished by its rusticated stone facing. The clustered column piers are topped with heavy caps carved in a stylized leaf motif. For many years this storefront was the home of the A.W. Preston Drug Store. From 1915 to 1929 the fourth Bartell Drugs in the region was located here until that company followed the commercial exodus to Market Street. In the 1950s it was the home of Dahlso Sporting Goods, a small local company that grew to become the regional Olympic Sporting Goods chain.

5. G.S. Sanborn Building. The Sanborn Building is one of the most noteworthy Ballard Avenue structures. It is the sole example in the district of the Romanesque architecture style popularized by architect H.H. Richardson in the eastern United States in the 1880s-1900. The building is wholly faced in sandstone. The central tripartite bay of its third story is surmounted by a bold round arch, the division pierced by many small openings. Early on it housed French & Nelson Dry Goods, later followed by Haufl's Department Store (from 1913-18), both landmark businesses during Ballard Avenue's early years.

6. Ballard Savings and Loan Building. This elegant little building is a modest-scale expression of the neo-classical revival style that was much favored in this period for large banks across the United States. Note the pediment that graces the front roofline and contains a cornucopia with the word "Thrift." Ballard Savings and Loan moved here in 1917 and flourished, surviving the Great Depression. In 1946 it was ranked first among Seattle's savings institutions in increases in savings, number of deposits and assets—a real testimony to Ballard's thrift-minded Scandinavian and Midwestern population.

7. This establishment is reportedly one of the oldest taverns still operating in the Seattle area. Charles Swanson and Nick Johnson acquired a liquor license in 1902 for their establishment, the Owl. Shortly thereafter Axel Johnson took over as owner and barkeep. He was described as "a big, genial man, who knows practically everybody in Ballard." During Prohibition, the bar was renamed the Owl Café. The ornate mahogany bar seen in this picture still exists in the current establishment.

8. This was the site of the Ballard Feed Company. In 1903 the owner of Ballard Feed, A.J. Boyd, purchased the Ballard Livery & Transfer Company and under his stewardship the Livery & Transfer Company became one of the largest companies of its kind in Seattle. The William Appleman Barber Shop was located here at a later date. The present owners meticulously restored the building in 1982.

9. From 1905-1918 this building housed the North Star Bar and Hotel. A typical mill worker haven, the North Star was a place where men could relax after long hours in treacherous working conditions at the mills and then retire upstairs to their sleeping rooms. During Prohibition the business changed to the Ballard Hand Laundry, but in fact it may have continued to function as a speakeasy. In 1971, Bob and Ann LeCoupé began restoring the old building, which sparked the preservation movement on Ballard Avenue.

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5443 – 5447 Ballard Avenue

541 1 Ballard Avenue

5435 Ballard Avenue NW

5345 – 5349 Ballard Avenue

216 Vernon Place NW

5301 Ballard Avenue

51 01 Ballard Avenue

51 40 Ballard Avenue

5403 – 5407 Ballard Avenue

541 1 Ballard Avenue

5345 Ballard Avenue NW

5301 Ballard Avenue

5403 Ballard Avenue

5401 Ballard Avenue

5410 Ballard Avenue

5345 Ballard Avenue

5435 Ballard Avenue NW
Historic Ballard Walking Tour

11 Cors and Wegener Building. Through the 1890s this was the most imposing structure in Ballard, and was rivaled for grandeur and style with its elaborate sheet metal cornice. Owners Cors and Wegener operated an elegant wine room in the 1890s-1910s at street level, with a separate ladies entrance and a private room. The clacking of typewriters and pounding of presses in the second floor offices of the Ballard News could be heard for many years.

12 Junction Building. This building, once boasting a third floor and corner turret, was one of the largest early brick structures along Ballard Avenue. In the early years Junction Hall was an important part of the Ballard community as the site of many community dances and meetings. The Crystal Theater once occupied a space at street level. A variety of cafes, saloons and other businesses occupied the many storefront spaces, and professional offices were located upstairs. H.E. Peck, attorney and the last elected mayor of Ballard, once had offices in this building.

13 Elks Building. This block was built by the Matthes Brothers, proprietors of the Old Home Saloon, and was originally a two-story building. The Elks purchased the building in 1905 and for many years the Elks Hall was located on the upper floor. The entryway tiles proclaim that during the “dry years” of Prohibition this was the home of the Ballard Branch of the Dexter-Horton Bank. In the 1980s the Olympic Health Club purchased the building and incorporated the neighboring building on Leary Avenue.

14 Scandinavian American Bank Building. This two-story structure is an example of the Second Empire Baroque style. The concrete venuer is treated to give the appearance of smooth-dressed stone, an example of the art of imitation fashionable in this period. “Vermiculated” cornerstones and keystones, together with a low mansard roof and curvilinear corner crest ornaments, complete the expression of this style. The Scandinavian American Bank was housed here and was the focus of a local scandal when it was closed in the late 1920s.

15 Comemorative Bell Tower. Upon this corner the City Hall of the Municipality of Ballard once stood. City offices, the jail, meeting rooms and even the fire department hose company were at one time quartered here at “Hose Hall.” A ballroom and banquet hall occupied the third floor and after annexation, this building became the local precinct house. The earthquakes of 1949 and 1965 weakened the building, however, and the old landmark was demolished in 1965. The building’s columns and bell were saved from the wrecking ball and were incorporated into a commemorative bell tower.

16 Built in 1908 for the Fitzgerald & Hynes Department Store, this stately building was constructed for a mere $15,000. The upper floor was leased by the Ballard Aerie of Eagles for two decades. Then, in the 1930s, Wiley’s New Car Sales & Dealership took up residence. During the 1950s the building housed the Ballard News Tribune printing plant.

17 Ballard Building. Built in the second Renaissance revival style, this building was designed by William R. Grant and constructed by the Fraternal Order of the Eagles. Opening in the 1920s, the Bagdad Theater, then the largest movie house in Seattle’s north end, occupied the lower level for three decades. Lafferty’s Drug Store, well known for ice creams and hot lunches as well as prescription service, occupied the street level for many years. The third floor housed Ballard’s community hospital from 1928 to 1954.

18 Majestic Theatre. When the Majestic Theatre opened in 1915, it was a “picture palace” offering a show that combined vaudeville acts with silent movies. In 1929, with the advent of “talkies,” it became the Roxy movie house. In 1948 architect B. Marcus Priteca created a new facade and the theater was renamed the Bay. In 1988 the Bay celebrated its 75th anniversary and was believed to be the oldest single-screen movie house still in operation west of the Mississippi. Subsequently Ken and Marleen Alhadeff bought the building and built a new $5 million theater on the site.

19 Carnegie Library. The women of early Ballard established a public reading room in the late 1890s. A few years later Andrew Carnegie funded the construction of this library, the first Carnegie Library in the region. Well-known architect Henderson Ryan designed the Classical Revival style building which served as a community lending library, school library, and center for language and naturalization classes for sixty years.

20 Fire Station #18. This picturesque brick building with stepped gables and strut-supported eaves was designed by the Seattle firm of Bebb & Mendel. It served the community for 62 years and was the oldest active fire station in Seattle. In the 1970s a battle over construction of a new facility threatened its survival but fortunately the old firehouse was spared and a new station was built a few blocks to the east.