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Stair Struck

By Paul Dorpat

Architectural designer and Queen Anne resident Thomas Horton has counted 120 public stairways on Seattle's Queen Anne Hill. Horton wisely describes it as a "fairly objective estimate." His objectivity comes from exploring on foot every corner and cul-de-sac of his neighborhood.

Horton got in shape walking around Europe and China, and, by disposition, he is easily motivated to look for the strange in the familiar. "I love finding hidden treasures, especially if they are everyday things that people use, take for granted and don't recognize as treasures — like stairways."

In the historical scene looking north from West Highland Drive we can see public steps No. 342 on the far left and just beyond the planting strip that runs up the center of Sixth Avenue West. At last count — in 2005 — Seattle had 482 public stairways, and these stairs on Sixth are one of the first three permanent (concrete) stairways built by the city, in 1906. Horton points out that while Queen Anne is not the highest hill in Seattle — West Seattle has that one — it does have both the most and highest steps of any hill in the city.

Thomas Horton stands second from left in the "now" scene, with members of the Queen Anne Historical Society, including, left to right, Del Loder, Isabel Eglin and Kim Turner.

This Wednesday, May 28, Horton will unveil his illustrated map and talk about "The Numerous, Wild and Oft Pedestrian Public Stairs of Queen Anne Hill." This event begins at 7 p.m. at the Queen Anne Branch Library, 400 W. Garfield St. Come packing your questions. Horton may well have answers.

"Washington Then and Now," by Paul Dorpat and Jean Sherrard, can be purchased through www.washingtonthenandnow.com (\$45) or through Tartu Publications at P.O. Box 85208, Seattle, WA 98145.

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THEN: Looking north on Sixth Avenue West from West Highland Drive on Sept. 12, 1912. The landmark McFee home is on the right.



PAUL DORPAT / SPECIAL TO THE SEATTLE TIMES

NOW: Members of the Queen Anne Historical Society's "Public Stairways Committee" pose on West Highland Drive with Public Stairway No. 342 hidden behind them in a landscape that has filled in considerably in the 96 years separating the "now and then."