Ferry was born in Michigan. Not a great deal is known about his early life, but Ferry’s father E. R. Burrows moved to Renton in the 1890s, and in 1896 Ferry decided to leave his home in Missouri and join him. On January 1, 1897 Ferry Fay Burrows arrived in Seattle with his wife Martha and their three children: Edwin, Melba, and Ruth. The family took the street car to Rainier Beach where they met Ferry’s father. E. R. Burrows put them in his boat and rowed them to his cabin in Renton.

On July 6, 1897, Ferry Burrows bought two acres of property on the Black River from two Native Americans: Tenas Bill and his wife Nellie. Within a few months, he built a houseboat and opened the “Burrows Fishing Resort.” The resort was designed to be a weekend getaway for recreational fishermen. The resort rented rooms at night and boats during the day.
Shoreline Map:
Renton

"Change Over Time: The Lowering of Lake Washington" was developed by Eastside Heritage Center in collaboration with the Bellevue School District.

## Map Key

### EXPLANATION

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- **Shoreline**: Corresponds to the line of mean high water level (saltwater) or mean lake level.
- **Mean lower low-water line**: The historical mapping made no distinction between intermittent and perennial streams. Streams indexed with solid, inverted triangles are historical channels that have been filled, diverted to sewers, or significantly modified. Open triangles indicate historical streams that today enter the lakes or bays in a near-natural state.
- **Wetland**: The historical wetlands were freshwater marsh except in Salmon Bay, where salt and brackish marsh existed.
- **Forested upland**: The historical forest vegetation was predominantly a mixture of Douglas fir, western red cedar, and western hemlock.
- **Grassland**: The historical grasslands included land that was logged prior to the surveys but not then developed for agricultural or urban use.
- **Agricultural land**: Limits of land cleared for agricultural use. The polygons represent plots of different ownership or fields for different crops.
- **Urban land**: (Now shown as streets, buildings, or structures)
- **Shoreline structures**: Piers, wharves, warehouses, and mills extending from the shoreline.
- **Solid-waste disposal sites**: Sites of filled or modified land where the filling has included general waste and demolition waste (Sources: Wilson, 1975; Phelps, 1978, p. 208).
Homer Venishnick Oral History
June 29, 1989

Interviewer: Carrie L. Berquist
Renton Historical Museum

Carrie: When did your family come to Renton?

Homer: Well, my mother came here when she was two years old from Missouri. They were settled at Black River, in 1896 I believe it was. And there was no transportation to that area at that time from Seattle along Rainier Avenue. So my grandfather, Captain Ferry Burrows, started a boat house for people to go fishing, a fishing resort.

Carrie: Was this actually on the Black River?

Homer: This was actually on the Black River. [...] Fishing was extremely good in those days. I’ve seen pictures; I don’t know where they are now. The scow was a boat that’s probably 5 feet wide and 20 feet long, and just like a big motor box, just a big box. And they put 8 or 10 guys in it, and had a couple bushel baskets, and when the bushel baskets were full and running over, they’d come in and spend the night in the boat house and go out the next day. Then they’d take them back to Rainier Beach with their mess of fish that they either smoked or gave away or canned or whatever they did with them. [...] 

Carrie: We were looking at this picture earlier of an area down by Coulon Park, and you were talking about the boat here.

Homer: Oh, that boat is very similar to the one that my grandfather had from the looks of it. The curtains around it, he usually didn’t have the curtains on it. But it was a steam launch, wood-fired, and when fishing was poor or off-season, for an extra income he would go to Monohan, it’s just south of Redmond, he’d go up the lake to Bothell-Kenmore, and go up the Sammamish Slough, and he’d pick up a load of logs to haul back. That was a one-day trip up there. And the next day he’d cut wood. And then they’d get a little more logs and come back about 3 days later.

Carrie: He was cutting this wood, though, for the steam…

Homer: For the steam power, so he could get back.

Carrie: For his boat?

Homer: Yes. He couldn’t pack enough wood to cut it all down here, he’d go up there, and of course by the mill there was extra wood, and it was easier to load and he could load it up there. And then he’d have enough wood to come all the way down the lake. And that would take him a couple or three days, according to how the weather was, and then he would stop and stay all night at home at the boat house, and then the following day he’d go out to the Black River and try to go out when the tide was high, and meet the Duwamish [River] when the tide started to go out, so he could go out with the tide instead of fighting the tide. You’d always use the tide to your advantage. That was one of his ways of making his income during those days.

Carrie: How many logs do you think he would bring down in a trip?

Homer: I don't know. It only had about a 10 or 12 horsepower steam engine. Probably equal to 6 or 7 truckloads nowadays, because of the big trucks and the big trailers. And of course the logs in those days weren't bundled. They were just laid side-by-side, so that would take up a bigger area, and they didn't displace as much water, but they would take more area. It had the outside log boom around it, called the boom logs, held them together. And the channel was pretty narrow up there. Not as narrow as it is now, since they lowered the lake. But when they lowered the lake, they lost the business. All of the parking lot where Boeing is was all lake bottom, where the stadium is was lake bottom. When they lowered the lake, I think there was controversy; 11 feet, 9 feet, 12 feet. I've never seen the actual engineering report. But most of North Renton was under water in those days.

Carrie: So the effect of that was good in some ways and bad in others.

Homer: Yeah, that's for sure.

Carrie: It sure probably affected the fishing?

Homer: Yes, it did. Now with the way the ecology is and everything, they could never have built the locks and diverted the lake out that way. The lake actually ran out Black River, so if you take all the water that goes out the locks now and through Lake Union, if all that was going out Black River besides what was coming in Cedar River, which was much larger than it is now, because Seattle takes over half of the water out of Cedar River; if we really knew, probably three-quarters is what they take out. When I was a kid there was a lot more water in there in the summertime than there is now. You couldn't walk across the river anyplace when I was a kid. Of course, my legs weren't as long. But I've seen a lot of changes in the river.

Interview with Martha Burrows Hayes, widow of Ferry Burrows, taken from a Seattle Times article by Lucile McDonald, December 25, 1955. Source: Eastside Heritage Center Reference Files.
“Change Over Time: The Lowering of Lake Washington” was developed by Eastside Heritage Center in collaboration with the Bellevue School District.


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Page 1 from 1920 United States Federal Census for “Renton City”. Source: Heritage Quest Online.