Walt Curtis was born in Vermillion, South Dakota in 1874. In 1877 the Curtis family (father Frank, mother Molly, Walt, and his brother Al) moved to Seattle, and seven years later they moved across the lake to Houghton. Their house was the largest home on the Eastside at the time, and the family rented out the extra rooms to travelers. Frank Curtis also operated the Squak, a small boat that carried passengers and towed logs between Seattle and Kirkland.

After the Squak sank during a storm in 1890, Frank Curtis and his sons decided to start a boatbuilding business of their own. For over a decade, the family built and operated steamboats on Lake Washington, including the Mist, the Peerless, and their favorite, the Elfin. Between 1901 and 1904 (accounts differ) they sold their shipbuilding business, but Walt continued to work as a ferry captain. After John Anderson started the Lake Washington Shipyards in 1907, he hired Walt as the captain of one of his first steamers, the Urania.
Shoreline Map: Houghton

Map Key

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<td>Forested upland</td>
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<td>Shoreline structures</td>
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<td>Solid-waste disposal sites</td>
<td>(NOT SHOWN)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

EXPLANATION

- 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: 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).
April 15, 1942 article from On the Ways, a newspaper produced by the Lake Washington Shipyards in Kirkland.  
*Source: Eastside Heritage Center Newspaper Collection.*
A Nautical Poem.
(Written by a Stoker.)
Hail to the queen of the silvery Lake,
The Urania, staunch and true.
The sunlight gleams on her rippling wake,
As she cuts through the waters blue.

The purser, he rattles the mon. in his purse
As he struts up the quarter deck.
The pilot eats pie, puts the glass to his eye
And looks for a possible wreck.

The stoker, he stokes, with the poker he pokes;
Keeps the pressure at two hundred pounds.
The brave engineer, now there and now here,
Keeps watch for unusual sounds.

She pulls up to the dock with scarcely a rock,
The deckhand he lassos the pile;
The passengers jump, or whether they bump,
In the true Seattle style.

Hurrah for the gallant Urania
With its whistle that means the earth quake.
She's the handsomest boat that was ever afloat
On the bosom of Washington lake.

Poem appearing in the newspaper Kirkland-Redmond Sun, Sept. 25, 1907. Source: Kirkland Heritage Society.
Curtis Primary Source 4

Capt. W. L. Curtis is now Master of the Leschi, succeeding Capt. Harry Miller, who resigned to become 2nd Officer of the new S. S. Sacramento. Capt. C. Hatch, of Seattle, has been appointed Pilot, to fill the vacancy made by the promotion of Capt. Curtis.

News article from the Bellevue newspaper Lake Washington Reflector, Jan. 20, 1918. Source: Eastside Heritage Center Newspaper Collection.
Photograph of the ferry Leschi when Walt Curtis operated it, circa 1918. Source: Eastside Heritage Center Postcard Collection.