

# Jefferson

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Name: **Jefferson School**  
 Location: 4720 42nd Avenue SW  
 Building: 8-room brick  
 Architect: Edgar Blair  
 Site: 1.69 acres

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1911: Named on June 1  
 1912: Opened in January  
 1918: Site expanded to 3.16 acres  
 1928: Addition (Floyd A. Naramore) opened in fall  
 1979: Closed in June  
 1982: Leased in December for 99 years  
 1985: Building demolished on June 18  
 Present: Site of Jefferson Square

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The West Seattle Junction got its name in 1907 when two streetcar lines connected at California Avenue and Alaska Street, forming a “junction.” Within three years, this neighborhood was booming and classrooms at West Seattle School were overcrowded.

In response to this growth, in 1911 the Seattle School Board investigated possible sites for a new school, the working name of which was the West Seattle Junction School. Edgar Blair, the district architect, was instructed to draw up duplicate plans to be used for this school and the Ravenna School, which was to be built at the same time. When a call for bids was authorized, the West Seattle school was officially named the Jefferson School in honor of Thomas Jefferson, the nation’s third president. Teachers and students were assigned to the building for the start of the 1911–12 school year, although the school was not scheduled to open until January 1912. A number of stores in the Junction were temporarily leased as annexes to hold classes until the school opened.

Jefferson School, located just one block southeast of the Junction, opened in early 1912 with only 135 children in three classes for grades 1–5. “We rattled around like peas in a pod because we had so few students,” said one student of that first year. “We had to be quiet to not disturb people.” The second year the student body was expanded to grades 1–7, and, in fall 1914, the 8th grade was added.

School enrollment continued to grow. In 1917–18, Jefferson held 443 students in 13 classrooms. The grounds were enlarged and the following September Jefferson was one of five Seattle Public Schools to



Jefferson, ca. 1945 SPSA 238-253



Jefferson, 1960 SPSA 238-255



Jefferson and Jefferson Annex, ca. 1945  
SPSA 238-254

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Name: **Jefferson Annex**  
 Location: 4720 42nd Avenue SW  
 Building: 5-room, 1-story wood  
 "Liberty Building"  
 Architect: n.a.

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1918: Opened in fall as annex  
 1928: Still in use  
 1959: Still on site  
 n.a.: Closed and demolished

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utilize a "Liberty Building" (see Bagley). These were inexpensive wood-frame structures that adhered to a national policy to conserve labor and materials for the war effort. With the opening of the five-room "Liberty Building," total enrollment at Jefferson rose to over 600.

E.L. McDonnell took the helm as principal in 1922, his first of 25 years in that position. West Seattle's population continued to grow and four one-room portables were installed to handle Jefferson's increased enrollment. A 1928 addition, termed the "south wing," contained eight classrooms and an auditorium-lunchroom. That year the grade configuration was expanded to include kindergarten. The following year the 7th and 8th grades were shifted from Jefferson to the new James Madison Intermediate School.

In 1931, the school board was asked to sell a 90-foot strip along Alaska Street for commercial development, because Jefferson was located in the heart of the West Seattle business district. Although the PTA strongly opposed the sale, the community voted "yes." However, the sale did not go through after the board promised not to sell unless it could compensate the school children with equivalent playground space south of the school.

During World War II, West Seattle's population boomed with the influx of workers employed in nearby shipyards and airplane industries. A nursery school was erected on the Jefferson grounds, using federal funds.

Enrollment continued to increase in the post-World War II years. Kindergarten enrollment grew to 175 children in September 1945. One of the three full-day classes was forced to meet in the auditorium. In fall 1947, the nursery school closed, and its building was used for kindergarten classes. That year there were six kindergarten classes, but only two 6th grade classes to graduate to James Madison Junior High.

The population boom led to the construction of Genesee Hill School. Prior to its opening after the first semester in 1948, Jefferson's 1,088 students attended school in half-day shifts. The transfer of 156 children to Genesee Hill did not solve the problem, though, and five portables were added to the Jefferson site from 1949 to 1955. In fall 1955, an all-portable school called Fairmount Park opened as an annex to Jefferson to relieve the overcrowded conditions.

Enrollment at Jefferson began to decline, dropping by 440 students in 1956–61. The extra space was used for three special-education classes. From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, the number of businesses at the Junction increased, and the neighborhood population declined, resulting in fewer students in the Jefferson attendance area.

Jefferson then became the school of choice for many people who brought their children with them when they came to work in the Junction. A bilingual program was added, and in 1978–79, the school had an enrollment of 78 non-English speaking children, many recent arrivals from Southeast Asia.

The district considered closing the site because of declining enrollment. After a 1978 study established that the building needed \$424,000 in renovations to bring it up to code, the school was closed. The main safety concern was potential earthquake damage.

In 1982, the site was leased for 99 years. Two-and-one-half years later, the Jefferson building was demolished and replaced with a retail-residential-parking facility, which commemorates the school with its name, Jefferson Square.