

## Allen

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Although the area north of Lake Union out to N 85th Street became part of the City of Seattle in 1891, the region west of Green Lake was without a school until 1898. That year, Mrs. Langley began teaching from 6 to 8 children in the living room of her home on Aurora (then called Green Lake Way), between 68th and 70th. She taught for 4 years until a public school was opened. Unlike Ross School, however, where the earlier private home site became part of Seattle School District holdings, in this case the district selected its own site, one with limitations that had to be addressed through the years.

In 1902, the district purchased an unplotted three-acre tract along the east side of Phinney Avenue at 66th Street. The school was named Park School for its location just north of Woodland Park, which the city purchased in 1899. A deep depression on the property was filled, but it still dramatically sloped 50 feet from west to east.

Although Park was an all-portable school, it opened as an independent facility, rather than as an annex. From the beginning it was squeezed for space. During the first year, 1902–03, three portables housed 99 students in grades 1–7. In March 1903, the school's name was changed to Kent but in September the same year, the school board changed it back to Park. The following school year a fourth portable was added, and enrollment rose to 171 in grades 1–8. Reacting to the climbing enrollment, the school board decided in November 1903 “that as soon as plans are proposed and approved to erect . . . an eight-room building at the Park School” site.

The permanent building opened in 1904, facing south toward an undeveloped 66th Street. It was the first, and simplest, of three school buildings designed in the Colonial Revival style by district architect James Stephen, the others being Stevens and Coe.

With the new building came a new name, the John B. Allen



Allen, 1904 MOHAI 9445

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Name: **Park School**  
Location: 6532 Phinney Avenue N  
Building: 8-room wood, 3-story  
Architect: James Stephen  
Site: 3.34 acres

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1904: Opened on September 5; renamed *John B. Allen School* on September 7  
1911: Site reduced to 2.54 acres  
1942–71: Referred to as Primary Building  
1974: Shifted from regular elementary school use to alternative school site in September  
1981: Closed in June; leased in fall  
Present: Managed by Phinney Neighborhood Association

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Allen, ca. 1945 SPSA 284-60

School, honoring Washington's first U.S. senator, John Beard Allen, who was instrumental in bringing the US Naval Shipyard to Bremerton, bringing Fort Lawton to Seattle, and building the Lake Washington Ship Canal.

The district assumed that the new building could handle enrollment in the years to come, and so the portables were removed in 1904, one going to Latona and another to Ross. However, the district had to open three single-room portables, termed the J.B. Allen Annex, just north of Green Lake in 1905–06 (leading to Bagley). Loren R. Shaw took over as principal of Allen in September 1905 and served in that role until 1936.

In 1911, Phinney Avenue was widened and the previously level setback of the building from the street was lost. A retaining wall was built along the west side of the building, giving the impression that the building had sunk. Fearing that the building might eventually have to be moved, the school board avoided adding to the original structure.

In early 1913, the North Phinney Improvement Club petitioned the school board for a new school or a new wing at the Allen site. The board determined it would be better to build an addition to the more modern West Woodland School. Enrollment at Allen continued to grow to 453 in 1916–17, and overcrowding led to the construction of a second Allen building.

Because of site restrictions, an addition could not be made. Instead a second building was placed on a different terrace facing east, along Dayton Avenue N. The second building, sometimes called the Lower Building because of the elevation difference, was built in the American Renaissance style, similar to Seward and Latona, which were built at the same time. It opened in 1918.

The architect initially designed a lunchroom and kitchen that were separated by a partition. However, the board followed the suggestion of the Supervisor of Home Economics who recommended that the partition be removed from the plans. The room then was used as the Home Economics area. Because there was no lunchroom, a portable was erected to serve that purpose.

An attempt was made to blend the buildings into a cohesive whole. Each building had its own playfield, while stairways connected the two



Allen, 1963 SPSA 284-1

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Name: **John B. Allen School**  
 Location: 6615 Dayton Avenue N  
 Building: 8-room brick  
 Architect: Edgar Blair

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1918: Opened; dedicated May 18  
 1981: Closed in spring; leased  
       in fall  
 1993: Retrofitted as safeguard for  
       earthquakes  
 Present: Managed by Phinney  
       Neighborhood Association

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levels. As the new building was being readied for opening, the blackboards were found to be two inches too high. Because the walls had already been plastered, the younger children were assigned to the older building, where the blackboards were lower, with their own play area on the upper terrace. The rooms in the buildings were numbered as if they were a single unit; rooms 1–8 in the upper building and 9–16 in the lower building.

The two Allen buildings had limitations inherent in their construction and facilities were stretched in 1932–33 when enrollment peaked at 758 students. Kindergarten had been added in 1931. In late 1940, parents petitioned the board to bring in a double portable for use as a gymnasium. In September 1941 and 1943, respectively, the 8th and 7th grade students were assigned to their nearest junior high schools. In 1943, the Home Economics area in the lower building was converted into a lunchroom and the old lunchroom portable into a gym.

Just prior to the November 1944 election, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* captioned a photo of the 1904 Allen building as “Old and Decrepit,” stating that levy proponents believed “such inflammable old structures . . . have outlived their usefulness.” In the 1945 Annual Report, the district used a photograph of the same building to represent its “obsolete buildings” in need of replacement.

The board, in March 1953, granted permission for the installation of a motor-driven air raid siren at the northwest corner of the Allen site. In 1957, the basement of the brick building was extensively remodeled into an enlarged lunchroom-auditorium in order to initiate a hot lunch program.

Over time, the school’s emphasis gradually shifted from the building on Phinney to the one on Dayton and, in 1974, the older building was closed to regular elementary classes. As enrollment at Allen

declined, an alternative program was added at the site. From the early 1970s, Allen offered students a variety of learning approaches, under the supervision of the Allen principal. Parents could choose between the traditional classroom approach and the alternative program.

The Allen Free School began in fall 1972 with 44 pupils grades 4–5 in a portable classroom, which was called “Allen’s Alley,” next to the lower building. The goal of the Allen Free School was to give each child an opportunity to decide what course of study to follow. Three years later the alternative program had moved to the upper building and was operating as a K–5 facility, with 108 students and four teachers.

In 1977, the Allen Free School evolved into the Allen-Orca Alternative School, for grades K–5. The philosophy of the regular program at Allen was the “Three R’s” while that of Orca was “Freedom with Responsibility.” The goal of Allen-Orca was to create an atmosphere generating attitudes of respect for self and others. By fall 1980, Orca had a waiting list of 70.

Faced with a combination of declining enrollment and decreasing federal resources, plus a building considered unsafe in the event of an earthquake, the district closed Allen School after spring 1981. At the time, Allen had 105 students in the regular program and 165 in Allen-Orca. Regular program students were reassigned to Day, Bagley, Greenwood, and West Woodland, while the Orca program was moved to Day.

Both the upper and lower buildings have been leased to the Phinney Neighborhood Association since fall 1981 for family and community activities. Current uses of the two buildings include a preschool coop, childcare centers, and community meeting space.