

Van Asselt

Name:	Van Asselt Elementary School	Enrollment:	384
Address:	7201 Beacon Avenue S	Nickname:	Bobcats
Configuration:	K-5	Colors:	Blue and gold



Van Asselt, 1965 SPSA 275-2

Henry Van Asselt settled in the Duwamish River valley in 1851 near the Maple family farm (see Maple and Holgate). The town of Duwamish was established in early 1852. During a brief war that followed the signing of several treaties, Indians burned Van Asselt's buildings to the ground.

Children in the Duwamish community first attended the Duwamish School, which was housed in the old blockhouse that had been Fort Duwamish (see Georgetown).

In the early 1860s, Van Asselt donated a piece of land for a new school. Because of that gift, the Duwamish School was also called the Van Asselt School. Constructed by Van Asselt, Luther Collins, and Jacob Mapel, the building was the first structure in King County to be erected for use as a school. Outhouses were located to the rear of the building.

In 1865, children from the Duwamish School transferred to the new Maple School on the Mapel land claim. In April 1907, just after Maple School was annexed into the Seattle School District, representatives of the Oregon and Washington Railway approached the school board about acquiring the Mapel property as part of a proposed right of way. The school was torn down in 1907–08.

As a replacement site, the district in September purchased part of the former 320-acre Van Asselt land claim on south Beacon Hill. The Van Asselt property comprised land on Beacon Hill east of what is Airport Way today and part of what is now Boeing Field.

The Van Asselt School opened in 1907 in a portable on 2.48 acres at Beacon Avenue and Myrtle Street. In July 1908, the board decided to add two portables that had been at Hillman. The following September, another portable was added, and Van Asselt became an annex to Columbia City School. Because of overcrowding in September 1909, Van Asselt 8th graders were given "schoolcar" tickets to attend other schools. This practice continued for several years.

A new Van Asselt School was constructed and opened during the

Name: **Duwamish School a.k.a. Van Asselt School**

Location: Van Asselt

Building: Wood

1862: Opened

1865: Closed

1944: Torn down to make way for buildings needed in the war effort

Name: **Van Asselt School**
Location: Beacon Avenue
& Othello Street
Building: 4-room wood
Architect: Edgar Blair
Site: 2.55 acres

1909–10: Opened
1910–19: Operated as annex
to Emerson
1919: Became independent school
in March
1940: Addition (A.M. Allen)
1944: Addition (Naramore
& Brady)
1950: Closed



Van Asselt, ca. 1965 SPSA 275-6

1909–10 school year. The new building, similar to the four-room school at Brighton, had capacity for 192 students and served only grades 1–6.

A 1940 addition added two classrooms and an office. It also eliminated outdoor plumbing and the use of two portables. In 1942, Holly Park Housing Project was established nearby on the southern end of Beacon Hill to accommodate 900 families coming in to Seattle for war-related work. Enrollment was expected to increase as a result.

In September 1942, Van Asselt parents were up in arms when a popular teacher, Etta Minnig, was unexpectedly transferred to another school. Minnig had been head teacher since 1923 during a period when enrollment exceeded 200 only once, in the 1925–26 school year. “Mrs. Minnig was described as an inspiration to the community whose gentle discipline and human understanding had transformed wayward boys to shining examples of decorum.” The board responded that the expansion of the school “warrants the employment of a man as principal. . . . We sent to the Van Asselt School one of the best-qualified men in our employ. When you consider that the attendance will increase from 120 to more than 600, you must agree that the situation called for something more than sentiment.” As late as 1950, Etta Minnig was still considered to be “the most beloved name in the history of Van Asselt School.”

Between April 1942 and April 1943, when all the units at Holly Park were filled, enrollment shot up from 212 to 606. The district then filed for federal aid to add three rooms at Van Asselt. As a result, a three-room frame addition was completed in March 1944.

By October 1944, there were “675 children crowd[ed] into six portables, a three-room annex, and the main building, which originally was designed to accommodate 140 pupils....Probably one of the busiest men in the city is Glenn Poirier, the attendant at the school. It’s his daily job to split kindling and start coal fires in 16 coal heaters and one furnace and light two oil burners in two auxiliary washroom buildings.” That November, in an attempt to urge voters to the polls for a school levy, the *Seattle Times* decried: “Typical of shocking and deplorably obsolete facilities of Seattle public schools is th[e] Van Asselt School lunchroom where luncheon shifts squeeze into one of the ‘temporary’ portables cluttering the grounds of the ancient structure which is vainly trying to house six times as many pupils as it was built for . . . teachers are asking parents to have their children come home for noon meals.” The levy passed in November 1944 but construction was delayed.

Name: **Van Asselt School**
Location: 7201 Beacon Avenue S
Building: 20-room, 1-story concrete
and brick
Architect: Jones & Bindon
Site: 9.5 acres

1950: Opened



Van Asselt, 1960 SPSA 275-3

A new Van Asselt School did not open until 1950 when the old building was replaced by a concrete and brick building on the expanded site. By spring 1945, enrollment exceeded 750 and 19 portables were in use. Attendance peaked at 1,271 students in October 1957, and, for several months, Van Asselt was the largest elementary school in Western Washington. In September 1962, the Van Asselt Annex opened 1.5 miles south of the school for grades K–3. It developed into the Wing Luke School. In spring 1964, Mabel Haugen retired after 50 years of teaching, the last 37 at Van Asselt.

In 1974, while part of the Van Asselt neighborhood consisted of private homes, “the bulk of the students lived in the Holly Park Housing Project, the Greenwood Apartments or Martha Major Apartments.” At that time, 53 percent of those enrolled were African American. As a magnet school for the Humanities Through Technology program, Van Asselt acquired computers, music keyboards, and teaching staff to help students explore world music and language.

Today Holly Park continues to be the home of many Van Asselt students. The composition of the student body has shifted to 55 percent Asian American and 58 percent bilingual. Half of Van Asselt’s classrooms mix students of different ages, giving students two years with the same teacher. Since 1996–97, students have worn navy blue and white uniforms. Monday morning all-school assemblies honor achievements and focus on a positive start to the week.