

## Allen



Allen, 1904 MOHAI 9445

Although the area north of Lake Union 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 six to eight children in the living room of her home on Aurora Avenue N (then called Green Lake Way), between 68th and 70th. She taught for four years until a public school was opened.

In 1902, the district purchased a 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, purchased by the city in 1899.

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 1903, 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 burgeoning enrollment, the school board decided in November 1903 "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 (see Stevens and Coe). The school was named for John B. Allen, Washington's first U.S. senator.



Allen, ca. 1945 SPSA 284-60

## Details:

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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 by Phinney Neighborhood Association  
 2009: Sold to Phinney Neighborhood Association

The district assumed the new building could handle increasing enrollment and the portables were removed in 1904, one going to Latona and another to Ross. Enrollment was still underestimated and three single-room portables, termed the J. B. Allen Annex, were installed just north of Green Lake in 1905-06. Loren R. Shaw took over as principal 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 either 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. By 1916, enrollment at Allen reached 453, and a second Allen building was authorized. The second building was placed on a lower terrace facing east, along Dayton Avenue N. Often referred to as the lower building because of the elevation difference, it was constructed in the American Renaissance style, similar to Seward and Latona, built at the same time. It opened in 1918.

An attempt was made to blend the buildings into a cohesive campus. Each building had its own playfield, with stairways connecting the two levels. As the new building was being readied to open, the blackboards were found to be two inches too high. Since the walls had already been plastered, the younger children were assigned to the older building where the blackboards were lower and 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 the 8th grade students were assigned to their nearest junior high schools. The 7th grade students followed in 1943. In 1943, the home economics area in the lower building was converted into a lunchroom and the old lunchroom portable into a gym.

Just before 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 school district’s 1945 annual report, a photograph of the same building was used to represent the district’s “obsolete buildings” needing replacement.

In March 1953, the board granted permission for the city’s engineering department to install a motor-driven air-raid siren at the northwest corner of the Allen site, one of 21 air-raid siren towers erected in the city in response to fears about the Cold War. Siren tests were conducted each Wednesday at noon until the early 1970s. During the tests, students were required to curl up under their desks and hold a heavy book over their heads.

In 1957, the basement of the brick 1918 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. When Allen’s enrollment declined, an alternative program was added at the site. Starting in the early 1970s, parents could choose between a traditional classroom approach or an alternative program.

The Allen Free School began in fall 1972 with 44 pupils in grades 4 and 5 in a portable classroom that 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 moved to the upper building and operated 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”—reading, writing and arithmetic—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 students.

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 in 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. The Orca program was moved to B. F. Day.

## Details:

Name: **John B. Allen School**

Location: 6615 Dayton Avenue N

Building: 8-room brick

Architect: Edgar Blair

1918: Opened; dedicated May 18

1981: Closed in spring; leased by Phinney Neighborhood Association

1993: Seismic Upgrades

2008: Designated landmark status

2009: Sold to Phinney Neighborhood Association



Allen, 1963 SPSA 284-1

In 1981 the upper and lower buildings were leased to the Phinney Neighborhood Association (PNA) and used for family and community activities. The neighborhood association used both buildings to house a preschool co-op, childcare centers, community meetings, and workshop space. The building retains its original heavy doors, wood wainscoting, and old chalkboards. The PNA provided capital investments in return for rent reductions. In 2008, Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board designated the former John B. Allen School as a historic landmark. In February 2009, during the school closure process, the district sold the Allen school to the Phinney Neighborhood Association. The state provided incentive grants to the community group.