

Briarcliff



Briarcliff, 1960 SPSA 206-4

A portable annex for grades 1-2 opened in 1912 to relieve overcrowding at Lawton School. Its location between two north-south ridges atop Magnolia Hill suggested its name, Pleasant Valley Annex. One early Lawton principal hiked through the woods daily to visit this outpost.

Pleasant Valley closed in 1926 with the impending opening of Magnolia School in 1927. In 1929, the Seattle School District purchased a larger piece of property some 6-7 blocks to the west, which bordered on Dravus Street, in anticipation of adding a high school there.

Two decades after Pleasant Valley closed, Magnolia School was overcrowded. In October 1947, citizens from the Magnolia neighborhood met with the school board to discuss building a new elementary school in the area. Though the 33rd Avenue W site had been sold, choosing a site was not a problem since the Dravus Street site was still undeveloped.

Heralded as an “architectural innovation ... the first of its kind in the country,” the newly planned school was a “transportable” building made up of rooms that could be attached or detached from a concrete central corridor. In response to fluctuating enrollment, the classrooms could be moved to another like school in the district. To this end, two other buildings of the same type, Genesee Hill and Arbor Heights, opened the same year.

Details:

Name: **Pleasant Valley Annex**
 Location: 3238 33rd Avenue W
 Building: Portable

1908: Property purchased
 1912: Opened as annex to Lawton
 1920-22: Second portable in use
 1922: Became Pleasant Valley School
 1926: Closed
 1941: Property sold on May 9

The site sat upon the western Magnolia ridge, thus necessitating a different name. The change from Pleasant Valley to the less euphemistic name Briarcliff was accompanied by start-up problems. The district intended the original configuration of six classrooms and an office to be ready for the start of the school year in September 1948. Instead, obstacles, including a shortage of workers and materials, forced Briarcliff's K-3 classes to begin the year in half-day sessions at Magnolia School, while 4th graders had morning classes in the Magnolia auditorium and afternoon classes in a vacant room. Even when it opened in January 1949, the Briarcliff building was far from complete. During the first year, students were sent home twice, once because of a furnace failure, and a second time for a sewer failure. It took workers the remainder of the school year to finish the facility.

Briarcliff was built without a cafeteria and lunchroom because virtually all targeted pupils lived within a half-mile radius and would be sent home for lunch.

The expanding student population on Magnolia forced the board to authorize two additional rooms for the school 25 days before Briarcliff even opened. These rooms were ready for the start of the 1949-50 school year. The addition of another two classrooms and connecting corridors set to open in September 1951 failed to meet the deadline. That fall Briarcliff became an independent school with the addition of a kindergarten and grades 5-6. The delay in finishing four more classrooms meant that grades 2-5 were double shifted for the first six weeks of school. It wasn't until April 1952 that a brick building containing a cafeteria and gymnasium/auditorium was finished, allowing the principal and secretary to move out of the nurse's room into their offices in the new wing.

While the transportable building looked glued together and left some parents with a "cold" feeling because of its many hallways, the design did have some benefits. Each of the classrooms had its own outside exit making it safer in an emergency. Hallways were quiet because they were rarely used by students.

Even with these expansions, the school could not keep up with increasing enrollment. In 1952-53, because of a shortage of space, the 4th and 5th grades were moved into classrooms at Blaine Junior High. The 5th grade classes were able to return to Briarcliff the following year with the addition of two portables, use of the auditorium as a classroom, and triple shifting of the kindergarten. The following year, 1954-55, another portable was added,



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and the 4th grade was able to return. A new portable was added in each of the three subsequent years. The enrollment hit a high of about 645 in 1957-58.

The Briarcliff site is dominated by the blue water tower across W Dravus. Dogwood trees, planted earlier by the school district in the parking strip, died in the freeze of November 1956. In their place, three pink and three white flowering cherry trees were planted, each set in honor of Japanese pupils who attended Briarcliff while their fathers served as the Consul-General of Japan in Seattle.

The number of pupils at Briarcliff gradually decreased to about 500 in 1963-64 and leveled off at about 320 in 1972-73. As part of the district's desegregation plan, in September 1978 Briarcliff received students in grades 1-4 bused across town from recently closed Hawthorne. Although only one staff member, 1st grade teacher Carol Postell, made the move from Hawthorne to Briarcliff, the operation at Briarcliff School was renamed Briarcliff-Hawthorne. Over the years, it emphasized the arts. The school became K-6 in 1982-83 after the closure of Blaine. In 1983-84, the combined student population was steady at 310.

The school was finally closed in spring 1984 due to a district consolidation policy as district-wide enrollment declined. The Hawthorne students were sent to Blaine, while students from Briarcliff and Magnolia, which closed the same year, were transferred to Lawton and Blaine. During the construction of a new building for Lawton (1987-89), the students from that school relocated to Briarcliff.

Briarcliff was utilized as storage space by the district until the property was sold in 2003 to Lexington Development, Inc. In 2004, the building was demolished, and the site became a housing development.

Details:

Name:	Briarcliff School
Location:	3901 W Dravus Street
Building:	6-room expandable, wood frame and reinforced concrete
Architect:	George Wellington Stoddard
Site:	4.58 acres

1949:	Opened on January 31 as annex to Magnolia; addition (Stoddard) opened in September
1951:	Became independent school; addition (Stoddard) opened in October
1952:	Addition (Stoddard) opened in April
1978-84:	Joined by Hawthorne students
1984:	Closed; Students enrolled at Lawton or Blaine
1987-89:	Interim site for Lawton
2003:	Property sold to Lexington Development, Inc.
2004:	Building demolished
Present:	Housing development