

## Broadway



Seattle High School, ca. 1905 MOHAI 88.33.164

Roots of Broadway High School can be traced to Seattle's first high school classes held in 1876-77 at the Territorial University in downtown Seattle. In 1883, high school classes were formally organized at the Sixth Street School, renamed Central School in 1884 (see Central II). After a fire destroyed this second Central School in 1888, high school classes were moved to Denny School. When the newest Central School opened later in 1889, the high school occupied the third floor.

The first Broadway school opened in fall 1890 for elementary grades in a rented room on Capitol Hill. Due to being located on Depot Street (now Denny Way) near Broadway, it was more often referred to as the Depot Street School than the Broadway Street School. The annual enrollment was 40-45 pupils. The school closed in spring 1893, just prior to the opening of Pacific School about 10 blocks to the south. Five years later, in 1898, the Seattle School District returned to the vicinity of the original Broadway School and purchased property just to the south along Broadway Street.

With the city's population growing rapidly at the turn of the century, the school board proposed erecting a new building on the Broadway Street site to be used exclusively for a high school. The construction costs, which came to \$250,000, caused consternation among citizens who could not foresee the need for such a large building. At the time, the high school population of the Seattle School District was little more than 800, while the new school was designed to hold between 1,400 and 1,500 students. The architecture of the new school was suitably grand for the city's growing stature, modeled after the Petit Palais in France. The school was called Seattle High School.

In order to relieve overcrowding at nearby elementary schools and to justify the size of the structure, the new building did not operate exclusively as a high school in its first two years. When it opened in 1902, it also housed

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Name: **Seattle High School**  
Location: 1625 Broadway Avenue  
Building: 70-room stone  
Architect: Boone & Corner  
Site: 2.12 acres

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1902: Opened in September  
1906: Renamed Washington High School on March 12  
1908: Renamed Broadway High School on October 7  
1911: Addition (Edgar Blair)  
1946: Closed as high school on June 14; opened in September as part of Broadway-Edison Technical School  
1948: Renamed “South Building” of Edison Technical School  
1966: Became part of Seattle Community College  
1967: Transferred to State of Washington on August 23  
1974: Demolished except 1911 auditorium; 1911 auditorium renovated  
Present: Site is part of Seattle Central College

the Union Grammar School, operated by its own principal. That year, Union Grammar School housed all the 8th graders from Cascade, Central, Columbia, Pacific, and 20th Avenue. The next year it was scaled back to 154 students who were 8th graders from Columbia and Pacific. By 1904, there were enough high school students to fill the building and Union Grammar School was closed.

In the early years of the high school, students participated in a mandolin club, a girls’ basketball team, several debate teams, and a football team that competed unsuccessfully against the University of Washington. Because the Seattle High School colors were black and orange, the sports teams were naturally called the Tigers. The 1907 baseball team was more successful and managed to beat the Huskies and send nine players to the major leagues.

By 1904, Seattle’s population had swelled, and Seattle High School’s enrollment had increased to 1,700. To ease overcrowding, annexes were set up in other school buildings. In 1905, the High School Annex was opened in the new Summit School. The following year, the annex moved to the original Franklin School (see Washington), where it operated until 1912 under a few different names before the program moved to its own high school in the Mount Baker neighborhood (see Franklin).

Even with the program at Franklin and the opening of Lincoln High School in Wallingford in fall 1907, there were still over 1,700 students at the Broadway site. In 1911, an addition that included shops, an auditorium, and gymnasiums was made to the Broadway structure on Harvard Avenue. Portables were set up to the east of Broadway in Lincoln Playfield (the present Cal Anderson Park, previously known as Broadway Playfield) in 1913.

The opening of other high schools meant the name of the school had to change. History repeated itself when the school board changed Seattle High School to Washington High School in 1906. In 1903, the board had attempted to rename several schools after individuals on the American Hall of Fame list and had briefly changed the second Central School (which contained the high school) to Washington School. In both cases, the use of Washington as a school name was short-lived. The name Washington High School was too often confused with that of the university, so in 1908 the board voted to adopt the name Broadway High School. This name was already associated with the school since it was often referred to as “the big school down on Broadway” and its students were known as “the Broadway bunch.”

Broadway earned several distinctions through the years. Both its school paper, *Whims*, and its yearbook, *Sealth*, won national awards. In 1920, Broadway High School took a pioneering step when it organized a student council, allowing students to participate in the administration of the school and its policies. The council met regularly with the faculty and administered a fund for student activities.

An experiment where boys and girls were separated started at Broadway in 1913-14 and continued for at least four years. Separate classes were established with girls being taught by women and boys taught by men. “The varying capacities and range of interests of the different sexes of high school age are such as to justify a difference in the method of treatment, and to a certain extent in the requirements of the curriculum.” The experiment proved so



Broadway, ca. 1940 SPSA 009-84

successful in the opinion of the school board that it considered building a separate high school for girls. The onset of World War I seems to have put an end to the plan. Enrollment at Broadway increased on January 2, 1920, when the school board opened the Part-Time School there. This provided a minimum of four hours a week of education to hundreds of high school-aged boys and girls 18 years old or younger who had dropped out of school to work. Classes for developmentally disabled students in the upper grades began in 1920-21.

In 1921-22, the total enrollment count was 2,230, and the Broadway High School Annex was built across East Olive (see Edison). The number of students continued to increase, and in 1936-37 totaled 2,368. In 1942, Broadway High School had by far the most Japanese American students of any high school in the city, with those students comprising at least 25 percent of the student body. During the previous four years, both valedictorians and salutatorians had been Japanese American. The removal of these students during World War II and the incarceration of Japanese American citizens had a serious impact on the school. Arrangements were made so that evacuees ready for high school graduation received their diplomas. In June 1943, 10 diplomas were also issued to Japanese American students who had been incarcerated at the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho.

In June 1944, the district considered moving Broadway High School to a new location with room for expansion. The school district reported that the neighborhood around the school had become a business district and enrollment had dropped as families chose to settle in other areas of the city. Furthermore, the building was referred to as “the worst fire trap in the district.” In 1944-45, only 1,216 students were enrolled at Broadway. In June 1946, the last class graduated, and the remaining students were transferred to Garfield, Roosevelt, and Lincoln. Parents, students, alumni, and community groups protested the closure. A public hearing was held, and the Capitol Hill Commercial Club and Lions Club took legal action in King County Superior Court, but the court upheld the district’s decision to close the school.

When World War II ended, large numbers of veterans returned home and hoped to complete their education. Broadway High School became the veterans’ school, its mature students looking more like college students than high schoolers. In September 1946, the building opened as part of Broadway-Edison Technical School. This school combined three programs—the vocational school (started in 1921), evening school (started in 1924),

and the new veterans' school—as well as the General Education Division. The Vocational Education Division was housed nearby in the former Broadway High School Annex also known as the Edison Building. In 1948, “Broadway” was removed from the school’s name.

In 1966, the old Broadway High School building became the center for the district’s new Seattle Community College, which had evolved out of Edison Technical School. The following year the administration of the college, as well as the building and property, were transferred to the state as part of the new community college system. In January 1969, the community college board of trustees voted to demolish the original Broadway High School building and replace it with a new one.

The city, community groups, and preservation activists including Victor Steinbrueck used all legal means possible to prevent the demolition. This included designating the building as a historic landmark in 1974. However, King County Superior Court ruled that the city could not interfere with the state’s authority to provide education allowing the state to proceed with demolition that summer. As a compromise, the community college retained and renovated Broadway High School’s 1911 rear auditorium addition and reclad its façade with stone taken from the original high school building. It is now known as the Broadway Performance Hall and houses the Broadway High School Alumni Archives.

The school district returned to the former Broadway High School when it established one of its Middle College locations on the college grounds in 1989. Its goal was to retrieve, retain, and promote at-risk youth by providing a quality high school completion program. As many as 200 students in grades 9-12 attended Middle College High School at Seattle Central Community College each year until 2001, when the community college reclaimed the space for expansion plans. In 2022, Middle College High School programs are still offered at three other locations throughout the city (see John Marshall).