

Cleveland High School Memorial Forest

The link between Cleveland High School and environmental education was established early in the school's history. During World War II, when the school was searching for ways to honor former students who died in the war, Principal Kenneth Selby (1940-45) suggested a living memorial.

Funds to purchase property for a memorial were collected primarily by Cleveland students in 1943 and 1944. Ed Boprey, a 1945 Cleveland graduate, told *The Seattle Times* that upperclassmen raised money through plant sales and selling recyclables, such as newspapers, tires, and batteries. One teacher gave a \$100 loan. Cash gifts were donated by the classes of 1942, '43, and '44, from Cleveland Junior High School, and proceeds from the high school's senior play. King County Commissioner Russell H. Fluent, who arranged the land bid, said he hoped Cleveland's effort would be followed by other schools.

At a tax auction on July 31, 1944, vice principal Ray Imus bid on a quarter section of logged land east of Issaquah on the Issaquah-Fall City Road. While bidding on it, "I was given a chance to say what it would be used for and nobody bid against me," he

told *The Seattle Times* during an April 1971 dedication ceremony at the forest. The 131.52 acres were purchased with the \$344 collected by Cleveland students (roughly \$5,700 in 2022 dollars) and the deed was issued to Selby.

On December 20, 1944, Selby and his wife, Ruth, signed a deed that transferred ownership to the Seattle School District, which was formally transferred on January 4, 1945. The school board had previously accepted the property "as a perpetual memorial to the Cleveland boys who have lost their lives in the war." Selby was promoted to assistant superintendent of schools in May 1945.

By the end of the 1950s, Cleveland students had planted more than 10,000 trees including Sitka Spruce, Douglas Fir, and Western Red Cedar. A survey was completed in that decade by alumni to identify property lines. The property remained without direct student involvement for several years.

In 1967, 32 students enrolled in the Seattle Public Schools' experimental Project Interchange program—funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity through the National Education Association—began work at the forest. The program was designed for students over the age of 16 who were close to dropping out. The 10 staff members were Job Corps graduates who trained for the program. Unique plans designed for each student were matched with counseling for personal and occupational challenges. That winter, the group cleared brush and



Cleveland Memorial Forest, 2022 ©Arthur Ross SPSA 012-294

Details:

Name: **Cleveland Memorial Forest**

Location: 28322 SE Issaquah-Fall
City Rd, Fall City

Site: 131.52 acres

- 1944: Purchased at a King County auction on July 31 by Kenneth Selby
- 1944: Quit claim deed signed over property to the Seattle School District on December 20
- 1967: Caretaker cottage constructed (SPS Building Construction Trades staff)
- 1969: Trail bridges constructed (SPS Construction Trades staff)
- 1971: A-Frame tool house (Project Interchange & SPS Construction Trades staff)
- 1999: Lyceum destroyed
- 2011: Restroom constructed (Miller Hayashi Architects; BTA II)
- 2014: Memorial plaque stolen
- 2017: New granite monument installed
- 2021: Development rights sold to King County Parks Department; Site formally named Cleveland High School Memorial Forest

prepared parts of the forest for field trips and nature study. Vice Principal Imus credited Superintendent Dr. Forbes Bottomly with helping revive student interest in the forest.

In 1967, an A-frame house designed by Cleveland architectural drawing students was built with material furnished by the Naval Ammunition Depot. A storage shed and the original 25-by-60-foot lyceum also was built. The shelter was called a lyceum based on Aristotle's outdoor academy in ancient Greece. An old portable was converted to restrooms and a septic system was developed. A separate bridge for the path was built in 1969.

Also, in 1967, a small, approximately 400-square-foot cottage was constructed by District Building Construction Trades. The cottage, called the "vacation house," has one bedroom and one bathroom. It is still in use today [2023] by a caretaker who contracts to stay at the cottage and monitor the acreage. The cottage has been updated periodically to maintain it for occupancy.

A World War II plaque, made in the Cleveland metal shop, was installed on the Memorial Rock (also called Commemorative Rock or simply the Rock) as a focal point in the forest. In the 1970s, names of those lost in the Korean and Vietnam wars were added on another plaque. The family of Cleveland High graduate Jim Rohletter, a prisoner of war, donated a flagpole during World War II. On May 24, 2002, a commemorative flagpole was raised thanks to the efforts of Cleveland alums Don Case (Class of 1948), Gordon Parker, and Pat Coluccio (Class of 1947), along with grandchildren of another alumnus.

Anthony Nogales, a Cleveland alum who taught Spanish at Mercer Junior High and Franklin High before taking an administrative role and coordinating field trips for Seattle Public Schools, began to encourage teachers' use of the Cleveland Memorial Forest as an

educational resource in the 1970s. That continued in the decades ahead.

In 1984, Ken Morrison, a science teacher at Garfield High School, began to bring students out to Cleveland High School Memorial Forest to participate in hands-on learning. That program evolved into POST 84, a student-focused outdoor education organization that strives to encourage environmental awareness and knowledge of the outdoors and has provided outdoor educational experiences for over 8,000 students from Garfield High School. POST 84 became independent from the Seattle Public School District in 2014 and is now a nonprofit organization that partners with the Boy Scouts of America. Other educators continued the practice of bringing students to the forest for environmental studies into the 1990s.

In the mid-1990s, volunteer work parties of parents, teachers, students, and school officials were formed to clear trails and repair the structures at the forest, helped by a total of \$150,000 in grants from the City of Seattle, King County, and the Department of Agriculture. The buildings and trails had fallen into disrepair in the previous decade as budgets were cut. Rapid residential development around the forest "made us realize that if we want to make any improvement on the property, we'd better get with it before it really gets populated," School Board member Ellen



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Roe told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in May 1995. Later that year, Superintendent John Stanford dedicated the Cleveland Memorial Forest Camp and Education Center as his first ceremonial act.

In November 1995, students who attended Cleveland in 1943 and 1944 sued the district to gain control of the property, saying in a King County Superior Court complaint “that more than 50 years of neglect and potential for loss of the property is enough. . . . Some future (school) board could easily forget why the property was acquired 50 or 100 or 200 years ago and dispose of it or abandon it . . . We who contributed the money to create this living memorial for our classmates were between the ages of 13 and 18 at the time. We didn’t know and no one told us that the funds we contributed were going to buy the property that would be put in the School Board’s name.” They wanted the land to belong to the Cleveland Memorial Forest Foundation, which they incorporated as an entity to own the property.

On Feb. 1, 2000, King County Superior Court Judge Joseph Wesley sided with the district in the lawsuit brought by Cleveland alumni, including 1947 graduate Byron Coney, a Harvard-trained lawyer who led an international land-title company and who as a freshman donated 35 cents to the purchase cost. In his summary judgement, Judge Wesley noted the property was deeded to the district on a gift basis and dismissed the alumni

effort without the option to refile the claim. The decision was upheld in 2002 by the Court of Appeals. The alumni hired former State Supreme Court Justice Phil Talmadge—whose daughter toured the forest as part of the Garfield outdoor group—to try to persuade his former colleagues to hear the case. The State Supreme Court did not opt to hear the case.

While the fate of the property was being determined by the court system, the lyceum, often used for scout meetings and class field trips, was destroyed in a September 1999 arson. Before the fire, it had been condemned by the district when the rotted roof became a hazard.

When BTA II passed in 2004, \$250,000 of that levy was earmarked for the Cleveland Memorial Forest. With these funds, a new restroom was designed in 2011 and built in 2012. The restroom building contains two gender-neutral stalls and a small covered area.

In 2014, the memorial plaques were stolen. Around this time, Garfield High discontinued its use of the forest. The following year, King County Forester Kristie McClelland said there were major problems with the forest and the alder trees and salmonberry bushes would dominate if the area was not managed. Seattle Public Schools approved a new lyceum design that year, one without a fire pit, but the construction project was not funded. The Alumni Association's offer to develop a forest management plan was rejected.

A new granite monument was installed on May 24, 2017, adjacent to the parking lot, and the forest had a re-dedication ceremony on May 26. Friends of the Forest began to hold their meetings at the forest, starting with their first meeting on September 17, 2018, and in spring 2019 Seattle Public Schools and King County agreed to discuss selling the development rights. That led to a letter drive to encourage Seattle Public Schools to sell the development rights to the King County Parks Department. That motion went before the School Board and the Alumni Association's proposal was unanimously accepted on March 10, 2021.

The agreement outlined a \$3.47 million payment to Seattle Public Schools for the conservation futures easements over 121.52 acres of the property, delivered in two payments on August 11, 2021, and March 31, 2022. The district retained 10 acres—the area including the memorial and existing structures—unrestricted by the easements and could develop this area in the future. The district retained underlying ownership and the ability to use, but not physically develop, the entirety of the property covered by the easements.

Seattle Public Schools can conduct forest management and timber harvest studies in the forest, and the agreement outlined that the location of any developed trail would be agreed upon by both parties in the future. King County assumed financial responsibility and liability for any future trail and its uses.

The deal with King County was strongly supported by veterans' groups and the Cleveland High School Alumni Association, which also negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding to better formalize the partnership. Among other things, that MOU establishes a working committee with the Alumni Association regarding the property, continues the annual Memorial Day event, earmarks \$150,000 to rebuild the lyceum, and calls for conducting a forest management study. The MOU also allows for the property to be properly named "Cleveland High School Memorial Forest."