

## Garfield

Name: James A. Garfield High School	Enrollment: 1,736
Address: 400 23rd Avenue	Nickname: Bulldogs
Configuration: 9-12	Colors: Purple and white
Newspaper: <i>The Messenger</i>	Annual: <i>The Arrow</i>



Garfield, 2009 SPSA 014-469

In 1917, the Seattle School Board authorized the purchase of property for East High School at a location suggested by the board's secretary, Reuben Jones, because it was "on a hill and the school would stand out." Construction was delayed until the end of World War I, and by that time there was a pressing need for space in the city's four high schools. Immediate action had to be taken, which meant that a temporary structure was erected at the East High School site in 1920. The 12-room wooden structure housed 282 incoming freshmen who transferred from Broadway High School.

Midway through the 1920-21 school year, 140 more students entered East High School. Portables were added, and by 1922-23 a total of 27 temporary buildings stood on the grounds. Enrollment by this time exceeded 900 students. Additional property was acquired, and construction began on a permanent building.

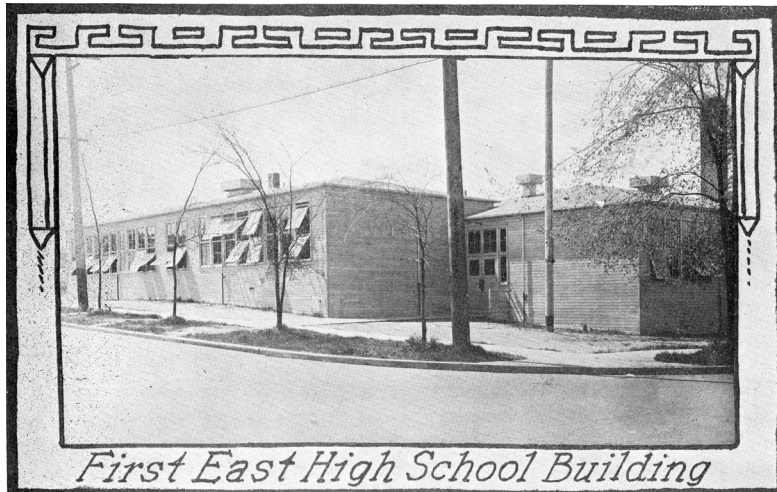
The first principal, George N. Porter, suggested that the school be named after James A. Garfield, 20th President of the United States, who earned recognition as a congressman and Civil War leader. Porter also selected the bulldog as school mascot and the colors purple and white.

The new James A. Garfield High School opened in September 1923 with over 1,000 students. The three-story structure was designed in the Jacobean style by Floyd Naramore. The building includes some of the most elaborate

## Details:

Name: **East High School**  
Location: 24th Avenue and E Jefferson  
Building: 12-room, 1-story wood  
Architect: n.a.  
Site: n.a.

1920: Opened  
1921: Renamed James A. Garfield High School on November 18  
1922: Site expanded to 4.42 acres  
1923: Closed in June



East High, 1921 SPSA, The Arrow, 1921 SPSA 014-467

and whimsical terra cotta details found on a district building, including oval and curvilinear terra cotta strapwork ornaments in the parapet, centered above the window bays. The main (north) entrance features a projecting bay with triple arched doorways. The spandrel between the second and third floor sashes have terra cotta panels, each with a different ornamental relief motif, among them a globe, a harp, a lion, and a sheaf of grain.

As the 1920s progressed, Garfield's student body increased to over 1,500. A bond issue passed in March 1929 providing funds for an addition to the building. The new south wing included laboratories and classrooms for 680 more students. Enrollment continued to grow until 1939, when it reached an all-time high of 2,300 students. In 1955, 9th graders transferred to junior high schools, reducing enrollment from 1,500 to 1,250.

Throughout much of its history, Garfield has been known for its ethnic and racial diversity. The Arrow annual in 1938 described the school as "a thriving community comprised of many races which are bound together by the staunchness of the Bulldog tradition." The 1945 annual emphasized contributions made by various groups in the school, including a Cathay Club that staged Chinese plays, and African American musicians. The Christian Science Monitor featured Garfield in 1946, referring to it as a school of many races with no race conflicts. In 1957, when the enrollment at most local high schools was 99 percent white, Garfield boasted a student body that was 48 percent white, 34 percent Black, and 18 percent Asian American or "other," according to an article in The Seattle Times.

From the beginning, Garfield set high standards for its publications. The school annual, The Arrow, received the All-American Honor Rating from the National Scholastic Press Association in 1934-36. The Messenger, the school newspaper, grew from a single page to an eight-page periodical publication and also received national recognition. Garfield's literary magazine, The Pen, provided an outlet for creative writers beginning in 1938.

Activities growing in popularity during the first two decades were numerous service, music, and athletic clubs. The Big "G" Club was established for girls who were active in sports. The Ski Club, which sponsored trips to Snoqualmie Summit, won several ski tournaments in the 1930s. Athletic successes for the decade of the 1950s included four city football championships, two tennis titles, two baseball championships, and a state tournament trophy in basketball.

In 1947, an academic exchange program was initiated with a school in Braunschweig, Germany. Over the next 10 years, students and teachers from these two schools participated in the exchange. It was the School Affiliation Service of the American Friends Service Committee that aided the two schools in this development of international understanding.



Garfield, ca. 1923 SPSA 014-8

Garfield students and staff also established a tradition of community involvement. During the 1950s, the art department worked with Harborview and the Veterans' Administration hospitals to create murals and other projects. The memorial wall at the east entrance to Memorial Stadium was designed by a Garfield graduate, Marianne Hanson, and dedicated on Memorial Day 1951, four years after the stadium's opening. The monument lists the names of the 762 known Seattle high school youths or alumni who died in World War II.

Irwin Caplan, a 1937 Garfield graduate and well-known Seattle illustrator and cartoonist, painted several murals of Paul Bunyan and circus scenes above the original casework of the third-floor art room during breaks between his classes. The murals were partially preserved during the 2006 BEX II renovation and one area showing trapeze artists was left in place. Other portions were divided into 4-by-4-foot sections and removed due to seismic safety concerns. The plaster paintings were framed and auctioned off.

Garfield earned a reputation for its superior music program. Its choral groups, marching band, and orchestra performed at many community events. Parker Cook, music teacher from 1928 until 1971, was honored in a mural outside the school auditorium, now the lunchroom. On November 10, 1961, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to students in the gymnasium, one of four speeches he gave during his only visit to Seattle. The gym was too small to accommodate the entire student body and King gave the speech twice. The school had long needed a new gymnasium, and in 1962 a two-story detached facility was constructed on the northwest side of the site. The Seattle Parks Department also built an attached community center at this time, which now operates as a Teen Life Center.

During the late 1960s, news stories circulated about racial tensions and violence at Garfield. There was talk of closing the school. On February 13, 1968, eight years after dropping out of Garfield and the year before his Woodstock performance, Jimi Hendrix gave brief remarks in lieu of a planned concert there.

By 1970, enrollment had plummeted to less than 1,000. A special Central Region within the school district was formed, led by an assistant school superintendent, with the intent of reestablishing quality education in

## Details:

Name: **James A. Garfield High School**

Location: 400 23rd Avenue

Building: 3-story brick and reinforced concrete

Architect: Floyd A. Naramore

Site: 4.42 acres

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- 1923: Opened in September
  - 1929: Addition (Naramore)
  - n.a.: Site expanded to 8.7 acres
  - 1962: Addition (Bassetti & Morse)
  - 2003: Designated City of Seattle landmark
  - 2006: School closed; Students relocated to Lincoln as interim site
  - 2008: School reopened; Historic renovation and addition (BLRB Architects; BEX II); Quincy Jones Performing Arts Center dedicated Sept. 26

troubled schools. This effort led to the 4-4-4 plan in the Central District when Garfield again became a four-year high school. Additional space was needed to establish a comprehensive program, and the former Washington Junior High School became part of Garfield, known as Garfield “B.” This annex housed music, advanced science, industrial arts, home economics, and other career and vocational programs.

By 1974, enrollment had grown to about 1,050, and the community coined the slogans “Garfield has turned the corner” and “This is the year of the dog.” The school benefitted from the construction of Medgar Evans Swimming Pool, a Seattle Parks Department facility built adjacent to the school. In 1979, the APP Program for highly gifted students was placed at Garfield, initiating an academic surge with a college-oriented curriculum. The program required all 9th graders to take math and science.

Into the early 2000s, Garfield housed a science magnet program. A popular marine science class took field trips to local beaches and faraway marine environments in Australia, Florida, and Hawaii. The Engineering and Manufacturing Technology Lab prepared students for high technology employment. For several years, Garfield produced the highest number of National Merit Scholars of any high school in the region. In June 2005, Garfield’s 406-member graduating class had 44 valedictorians with perfect 4.0 grade-point averages.

In 2003, Garfield was designated a City of Seattle Landmark. The exterior of the building, the site, and a few key features of the interior were part of the designation. In June 2006, Garfield closed for a two-year reno-



Garfield, 1965 SPSA 014-17

vation project. Due to the limited scope of the landmark designation, “gone will be the purple-permeated hallways, doorways and rooms where seemingly little has changed since the building opened in 1923, giving visitors an eerie sense of walking back in time,” Garfield historian and honorary 1972 graduate Bill Kossen wrote in *The Seattle Times*.

Construction started the month after graduation, and the Bulldogs spent two years at Lincoln while crews built new 900-square-foot classrooms, new student learning centers, an outdoor courtyard, lab spaces, a state-of-the-art performing arts center, a new double gymnasium, an auxiliary gymnasium, an all-weather track and regulation football field, and additional office space—all within parameters of the landmark status. Many unique features were preserved, such as the stage proscenium in the original auditorium, original terrazzo floors, decorative plaster detailing, and the pendulum clock. Dr. Lawrence Matsuda, a longtime Seattle Public Schools teacher and principal who also taught the state’s first Asian American history course in 1969 at Sharples Junior High, was hired as a consultant. Matsuda recommended the driveway off 23rd Avenue—a design not in the original remodel plans—but what has since become arguably the most valued access point.

Longtime principal and 1985 Garfield alum Ted Howard II welcomed students back on September 3, 2008. Quincy Jones—the music legend and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member who produced Michael Jackson’s record-setting album *Thriller*, among others—returned to the school for the September 26, 2008, dedication of the Quincy Jones Performing Arts Center. Jones, who was student director of the Garfield Swing Band before his 1950 graduation, lived with his family on 22nd Avenue a block from where the performing arts center now stands. The same year as its dedication, Jones was given the first Lifetime Achievement Award at the grand-opening gala for the Northwest African American Museum.

Garfield offered College Access Now (CAN), a program to empower students from low-income families to access, enroll, and graduate from college at rates equal to their more-advantaged peers. Since 2017, Bulldogs have also benefitted from the College Success Foundation scholars’ program, which provides mentors and scholarships to low-income and first-generation college students.

Garfield is still known for its award-winning concert band, jazz band, and orchestra, all of which perform at regional, national, and international venues. In 2019, when 71-year-old Clarence Acox retired after 40 years of jazz band direction and 48 years overall at Garfield, Wynton Marsalis, artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center in



Garfield, 2022 ©Arthur Ross SPSA 014-471

New York, praised Acox, telling *The Seattle Times* he had “unbelievable respect for what Clarence has achieved” with his love for music and the clarity and feeling Acox brings to his students. In 1999, Garfield first earned one of 15 finalist slots at Essentially Ellington, the most prestigious high school jazz competition in the United States. When Acox, who started at Garfield in 1971, retired, Garfield had placed four times—a festival record that stood until Roosevelt High in north Seattle tied it in 2019.

Garfield was also known as an athletic powerhouse, with 23 state basketball titles through the 2021-22 school year, a Washington record. Joyce Walker—a 1980 Garfield graduate, two-time All-American and U.S. Olympic Team alternate who’s widely regarded as the best woman basketball player from a Washington high school—led the Bulldogs to a state championship as a senior and then coached the Garfield girls to a state title in 2005. Four years later, Walker’s nephew, Tony Wroten Jr., became the first freshman in state history named to the All-Washington State 4A team and went on to be a first-round NBA draft pick. Garfield’s other first-round NBA pick, 2002 graduate Brandon Roy, was NBA Rookie of the Year in 2007 and a three-time NBA All Star.

In 1992, the field at Memorial Stadium was named for Leon H. Brigham—called the godfather of Seattle high school sports—who coached Garfield football and track teams to championships in the 1920s and 1930s before a 17-year tenure as the district’s first athletic director.

On November 7, 1975, at Memorial Stadium, Garfield played Blanchet in a four-overtime football game for the Metro League Championship before a record crowd of 12,951. The game, which Garfield lost 42-35 on a halfback pass, was named the Washington high school sports game of the century by both *The Seattle Times* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Bruce Harrell, Seattle’s current mayor (2023), was a Garfield valedictorian and captain on the team. He told *The Times* in 1976 his ambition to run for public office was sparked during his freshman year at Garfield. When Harrell organized the One Seattle Day of Service in 2022—an event that brought together nearly 4,000 volunteers for city service projects—Harrell joined Garfield students and their families picking up litter, gardening, and beautifying the area around his alma mater.

Other famous alumni include Ben Haggerty, who is better known by his stage name Macklemore; Olympic Gold Medal skier Debbie Armstrong; jazz singer Ernestine Anderson; architect Fred Bassetti; actor John Aylward; and activist, teacher and SPS School namesake Aki Kurose.

Garfield hosted its 100th anniversary with a community celebration on August 27, 2022. The celebration was delayed a few times because of COVID-19. Bruce Harrell hosted the Centennial Program.