

King (formerly Harrison)



Harrison, 1928 SPSA 232-1

By 1890, Madison Valley was sparsely settled and, in places, heavily forested. One of the early settlers was William Grose, a Black man who owned a restaurant, hotel, and barbershop in the area.

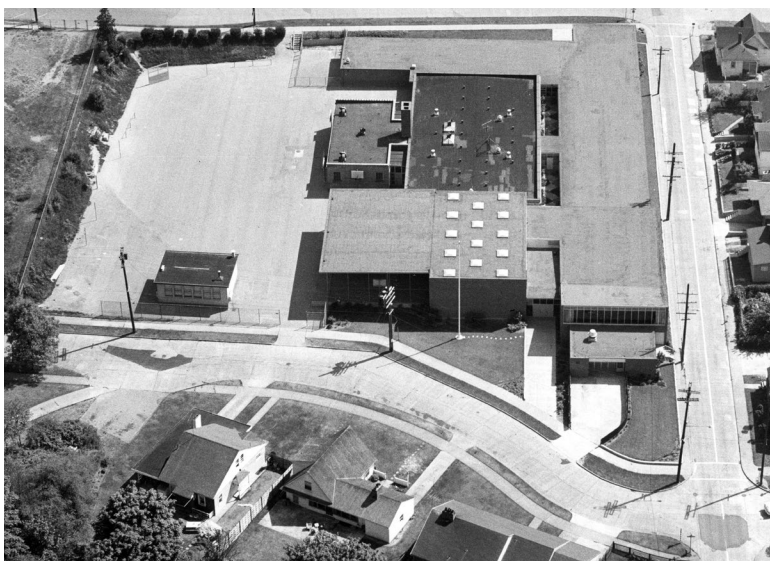
After the turn of the century, the Madison Street cable car ran above the neighborhood on a high trestle, which improved access and encouraged growth. In November 1904, agents for the Columbia & Puget Sound Railroad Company, which operated the cable car, approached the Seattle School Board with an offer to sell the district a site for a school in the valley. The proposal was accepted. In December 1912, a neighborhood committee presented a petition from the surrounding community with a request for the construction of a new school at the Harrison Street site. The motion would not be approved until March the following year.

The new school was named for Benjamin Harrison, the 23rd President of the United States, on April 16, 1913. Harrison facilitated the creation of the National Forests and substantially strengthened and modernized the United States Navy. He proposed, unsuccessfully, federal education funding and voting rights enforcement for African Americans in the South.

The original blueprints for the school indicate there were plans to expand the building from its humble six-classroom beginning to 25 classrooms, but the expansion did not materialize until the 1950s. In fact, the school that was initially constructed was simply the first floor of the standard nine-room school used by the school district.

Harrison School opened in 1913 with grades 1-4. In 1918, the PTA petitioned the school board to complete the planned additions so children above 5th grade wouldn't have to go to other schools, such as McGilvra or Longfellow. The request was referred to the superintendent to report on the situation and it was ultimately determined that the children of the district were being served and the proposal did not proceed. However, the nearby community continued to grow with an influx of shipyard and other industrial workers during and immediately following World War I. Harrison School expanded in the 1920s to grades 1-6 after portables were placed on the school grounds.

During the early Depression years, with a decline in industrial employment and population, enrollment at Harrison decreased until it reached a point where the cost per pupil became prohibitive. In July 1932, the school board closed Harrison, except for a single room housing the 1st grade. All other children were assigned to Long-



Harrison, 1960 SPSA 232-5

fellow or Madrona. The entire building was closed one month into the 1934 school year because of insufficient enrollment, after which members of the neighborhood besieged the board with requests to reopen it. Two rooms, for grades 1-3, were reopened two years later.

In 1954, a group from the Harrison community approached the school board requesting that the school's boundaries be expanded to maintain a racial balance. Superintendent Fleming responded that, "Harrison School had been reopened and extended only as a means of avoiding overcrowding and portable construction at Madrona and McGilvra Schools and that the grounds and facilities at Harrison were not adequate for much further expansion." Contrary to this statement, a modern addition was made in 1958. It included eight classrooms, a gymnasium, a play court, and lunchroom-auditorium. The construction expanded the front of the building outward to run the full length of 32nd Avenue between Harrison and Republican. Thereafter the boundaries were extended to include students living north of Madison Street.

Headlines in the November 2, 1970, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* proclaimed: "Parents 'Revolt' at Harrison," referring to the active involvement of more than 250 parents in the operation of the school. Parents made visual aids and instructional materials, provided counseling, and served as cafeteria assistants, hall monitors, and tutors. Under the leadership of Principal Louise McKinney, the Harrison Early Children Education Center employed ungraded, continuous-progress educational methods. Harrison was a demonstration school for grades K-3 and many of the 365 children came from other parts of the city.

In spring 1974, a school-wide election supported changing the school's name from Harrison to honor civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. The renaming was approved by the school board on March 27, 1974. Teachers and students of Room 10 were present at the school board meeting to witness approval of the name

Details:

Name: **Harrison School**
 Location: 32nd N and E Harrison;
 3201 E Republican
 Building: 6-room brick
 Architect: Edgar Blair
 Site: 1.6 acres

1913: Named on April 16; opened in September as annex to Longfellow
 1924: Became independent school
 1934: Closed in fall
 1936: Reopened in September as annex to Longfellow
 1942: Site expanded to 1.93 acres
 1942-50: Operated as annex to Stevens
 1950-52: Operated as annex to McGilvra
 1952: Became independent school in September
 1958: Addition (Bindon and Wright)
 1970: Became Harrison Early Childhood Education Center
 1974: Renamed Martin Luther King Early Childhood Education Center
 1989: Became Martin Luther King Elementary School
 2006: School closed; students reassigned
 2010: Property sold to First AME Church
 2011: Martin Luther King FAME Community Center opened
 Present: Site of Martin Luther King FAME Community Center

change. Unfortunately, the school was mis-named Martin Luther King Elementary School, which excluded the Jr. suffix. The oversight was never corrected.

On January 30, 1975, a hundred students from Lake City School came to attend special classes and programs relating to Dr. King's life. The schools were paired in a federally funded program aimed at "increasing contact between school-age children of different backgrounds."

King was returned to a K-5 neighborhood school in 1989. In the early 1990s, King was the smallest elementary school in the Seattle School District. Its small size and special programs, such as English proficiency, were seen as beneficial to students. In 1992 King teacher Jan Lind-Sherman started a foundation after her husband hit a lottery jackpot. Its main activity was providing college scholarships to former King students and helped look for ways to increase enrollment at King.

In May 1993, a proposal to house the African American Academy at the site was made, but opponents claimed that such a change would threaten the small school's independence. After the African American Academy was moved to Magnolia instead, King still faced a challenge to bring its enrollment up to the district's 200-student minimum. This challenge was met, and by 2000 King was sometimes referred to as the "best kept secret" in the district with its preschool program, special education class, new computer lab, and occupational therapy program. A federal grant helped it become the first magnet school for performing arts and technology in the district.

By the 2002-03 school year, King was one of ten schools in the district with fewer than 250 students, and two years later, with enrollment having dipped to 138, the district began to explore the option of closing the school as a cost-cutting measure. For some parents, the news was distressing. "When I go there, there's this warm, wonderful feeling. It's a family," Julia Holland, who had two children at King, told *The Seattle Times*. "That's what I really like about it. It's a small school—your children are not a number. The teachers pay individual attention to each student."

A proposal to add a Montessori program to attract students at King was given conditional approval for the 2005-06 school year. A month later, the district presented a cost-cutting plan that would close eight elementary schools, including King. With closure all but assured, the principals at King and T.T. Minor floated a proposal in which King students and most of their teachers would move into the nearby T.T. Minor building in fall 2006. On June 21, 2006, classes were held at King for the final time. For the 2006-07 school year, most of King's students were reassigned to Minor or Madrona K-8 and the King building was shuttered, ending its 93-year run in Madison Valley.

The district declared the 1.9-acre King property as surplus in 2007 and mothballed the building until October 2010, when the school board approved a \$2.4 million sale of the site to the First African Methodist Episcopal (FAME) Church for a planned community center. The sale of the building entailed conditions, including a requirement that the building be made available to the community for a certain number of hours.

In 2010, the district, still eager to have a school named for the late civil rights leader, renamed Brighton as Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School.



Harrison, 1960 SPSA 232-7