

Seward

Name: TOPS K-8 School at Seward	Enrollment: 485
Address: 2500 Franklin Avenue E	Nickname: Falcons
Configuration: K-8	Colors: Baby blue, white, silver



Seward (1895 building), 2001 ©Mary Randlett SPSA 271-385

In the 1890s, the northwest Capitol Hill area was still thick with trees, and houses were few and widely scattered. A wagon road ran along the hillside parallel to what is now Eastlake Avenue. Realtor Henry Fuhrman owned most of the land from Edgar Street to the channel between Lake Union and Portage Bay, while David T. Denny owned land to the south. In 1892, the school board purchased property in what was called the Denny-Fuhrman Addition.

Three years later, a two-room wooden pavilion school was built on the eastern side of the property. The school was called Denny-Fuhrman after the real estate division. In the beginning, all eight grades occupied just one classroom. In 1899, the second classroom was put into use. That room soon filled, and a third classroom was added.

By 1903, Franklin Avenue, along the west side of the school, was part of a bicycle path from Lake Union to Madrona Park. A streetcar line ran as far as where Louisa Street is today. Portables were needed at the school in 1904-05. With steadily increasing enrollment, the board recognized that a new building was necessary.

Details:

Name: **Denny-Fuhrman School**
 Location: Franklin and Louisa Streets
 Building: 2-room wood
 Architect: Chamberlin & Siebrand
 Site: 1.61 acres

1895: Opened
 1899: Addition (James Stephen)
 1905: Closed
 1908: Building moved to SE corner; used as annex
 1917: Building moved to SW corner; used as annex
 1981: Exterior designated city landmark in April
 1998: Closed for construction and moved to the SE side of the site

Details:

Name: **Seward School**
Location: 2515 Boylston Avenue E
Building: 8-room wood
Architect: James Stephen
Site: 1.61 acres

1905: Named Marcus Whitman School on July 7; renamed Seward School on September 11; opened in September
by 1910: Site expanded to 1.83 acres
1917: 8-Room brick building addition opened (Edgar Blair)
1925: Site expanded to 2.08 acres
1981: Exterior designated city landmark in April
1989: Closed in June
1989-91: Interim site for Colman
1991: Became home of TOPS K-8
1998: Closed for construction; Students relocated to McDonald as their interim site

In 1905, the “model school” built at Denny-Fuhrman was similar to others completed in the first decade of the century. Like the original Van Asselt, it featured a Tudor-style design with stucco and half-timbering on the second floor. The new school was named after William Henry Seward, U.S. Secretary of State who initiated the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. The furnace was located in the basement, and every Wednesday the teachers brought in T-bone steaks, which they barbecued on coals prepared in the furnace by the janitor.

Seward School grew rapidly in its first decade, from 254 students to 462 in 1915-16. The school became so crowded that at least one class was held in the upstairs hall and another in a portable. In March 1908, a committee from the Eastlake Avenue Improvement Club urged the school board to tear down the 1893 schoolhouse. Instead, the old wooden pavilion was moved to the southeast corner of the grounds and used as an annex for primary grades. In 1911, 8th grade students went one afternoon a week to Lowell for shop and home economics.

The growth of the University of Washington and especially the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (AYP) held on the university campus in 1909 spurred city growth and encouraged the building of new roadways and streetcars in the Eastlake neighborhood. William Seward was honored with a statue unveiled at the AYP as Seattle celebrated its close ties with the northernmost territory. The statue is now

in Volunteer Park. The Exposition also spurred the parks department to develop Rogers Playfield, located across Franklin Avenue to the west of the school, in 1912.

In 1917, a brick building was constructed on the eastern portion of the property, and the 1895 annex moved again, this time to the southwest corner. It became a shop and home economics classroom. The brick addition, similar to those built at Latona and John B. Allen the same year, contained eight classrooms, an auditorium, and two playrooms. At this time, Seward consisted of three buildings representing three different eras of school

construction. By 1922-23, the original building was used as the lunchroom.

Seward became a demonstration school in 1932, and its staff was exchanged for the staff at Summit. District teachers came to Seward to observe the latest teaching methods and materials during half-day sessions.

Enrollment over the next two decades fluctuated between 400 and 600. In 1950, the school’s boundaries changed after an earthquake destroyed Cascade in 1949. Seward then served an area from the University Bridge in the



Seward, 1905 MOHAI 83.10.7456

north to Denny Way in the south. The demonstration school was discontinued in the early 1960s.

Construction of Interstate 5 immediately to the east of the school had a negative effect during the 1960s. The neighborhood was cut in two, and many homes had to be removed to make way for the freeway. Enrollment dropped to 395 in the 1964-65 school year. Special education classes began in 1966 and continued through 1969. When Horace Mann closed in 1968, some students from that school transferred to Seward.

In the early 1970s, a program called “Friday Choice” was initiated by parents. Each Friday afternoon students participated in activities, such as woodworking, chess, cooking, and stamp collecting in small groups led by parents, volunteers, and teachers. At this time, the school was K-4, part of the Central Area’s 4-4-4 program (see Stevens).

In June 1988, the school board voted to close Seward, an action that had been threatened for at least 10 years. Seward’s last regular classes were dismissed in June 1989, and the school immediately became the interim site for Colman (see Thurgood Marshall), which was awaiting completion of its new building. Meanwhile, TOPS parents advocated a plan to move their program to Seward from Stevens and expand it to a K-8 once the Colman students left. In anticipation of the change, 6th grade students were introduced to TOPS the last year the program was located at Stevens and the additional two grades were added over the course of the next two years after the program moved to Seward in 1991. Thereafter, its initials stood for The Option Program at Seward.

From September 1997 to June 1999, while a major renovation and expansion project was underway at the Seward site, TOPS students were housed at McDonald. The interiors of all three buildings that were landmarked in 1981 were reconfigured and replaced by new rooms and materials. Project contractors faced many challenges in the historic structures, such as compensating for the 1895 building’s shape, which was completely “out of square.” The 1895 building was moved to the south side of the Tudor building and repurposed for use as the cafeteria. A

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Seward (1917 building), 2001 c. Mary Randlett SPSA 271-387

Details:

Name: **Seward School**

Location: 2500 Franklin Avenue E

Building: Wood and brick

Architect: Duarte Bryant

1999: School reopened to TOPS program; Additions connect 1895, 1905 & 1917 buildings (Duarte Bryant; BEX I); Separate gym

2010: Seismic updates

new learning resource center connected the 1905 and 1917 buildings and a new gymnasium was constructed. The school reopened in September 1999.

Part of the landmarked building required triple-pane historically accurate replica windows to shield the students from the noise on Interstate 5. In 2009, the Washington State Department of Transportation installed noise walls along Boylston to mitigate noise from the freeway.

In conjunction with the renovation of Seward, the City of Seattle Department of Transportation designated Franklin Avenue in front of the school a “Green Street.” The road is closed to auto traffic to give priority to pedestrian circulation, and to help preserve the many notable and exceptional trees that line Franklin Avenue. The combina-

tion of the “Green Street” and Rogers Playfield provides students with plenty of outdoor space to use during recess.

The buildings were later added to the Washington Heritage Register in 2020.

TOPS became home to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Program for elementary students when the program moved from View Ridge in 2006. In 2014, the DHH program for middle school students moved to TOPS from Eckstein. The DHH Program is a self-contained program for students with moderate to severe hearing loss. DHH students attend their own class for most of the day but join TOPS general education students in other classes as appropriate.

TOPS remains an option school under the student assignment plan. TOPS practices cross-age and multi-age choice learning with involvement from parents, staff, students, and the community. Other programs offered over the years include Spanish and sign language instruction, and before- and after-school programs such as chess, drama, band, art, video production, yoga, martial arts, camping, and keyboarding.

Over 30 years ago, the TOPICS program at TOPS was developed and it is still going strong. Through the TOPICS program, parents, guardians, friends and community members are given the opportunity to share their talents, cultural diversity, knowledge, and excitement for learning to the small groups of mixed-grade students. Each group or subject is called a TOPIC. Through classroom signups the students choose from the variety of TOPICS offered each time, one that is of interest to them.



Seward 2000: 1999 gym (left), 1905 building (center), 1917 building (back), 1895 building (right) ©Mary Randlett SPSA 271-386