

West Seattle High School

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| Name: West Seattle High School | Enrollment: 1,141 |
| Address: 4075 SW Stevens Street | Nickname: Wildcats |
| Configuration: 9-12 | Colors: Blue and gold |
| Newspaper: <i>The Chinook</i> | Annual: <i>Kimtah</i> |



West Seattle, ca. 1917 SPSA 019-5

In the late 1800s, children in West Seattle had to go into Seattle for school or not be educated at all. A local resident, Mr. Haller, donated a tract of land at what is currently 47th Avenue SW and SW Walker Street for the first school in School District No. 73, but the community quickly outgrew the space. In 1893, District 73 bought land at California Avenue and Lander Street.

In 1902, high school students living in West Seattle began attending West Seattle School, a combined grammar and high school (see Lafayette). Basketball games were played in a third-floor gym. The school's first principal, W. T. Campbell, a city council member, was the father of Ernest W. Campbell, who became Seattle Schools superintendent in 1956.

In 1908, when West Seattle was annexed into Seattle, the school served more than 500 students. Twelve seniors graduated in 1910. Recognizing the need for a separate high school, the district purchased a site in 1914 on the south side of the new Hiawatha Playfield. Overcrowding led to several portables jamming the site the following year.

West Seattle High School opened in September 1917. The two-story building had 38 classrooms, an auditorium, library, gymnasium, and offices. The school's Romanesque architectural style is unique in the district with a

Details:

Name: **West Seattle High School**

Location: 4075 SW Stevens Street

Building: 38-room reinforced
concrete and masonry

Architect: Edgar Blair

Site: 3.5 acres

- 1917: Opened in September
- 1924: Addition (Floyd A. Naramore)
- 1928: Site expanded to 5.6 acres
- 1930: On-site annex opened
- 1948: Site expanded to 8.6 acres
- 1954: Addition (NBBJ)
- 1959: Addition (Theo Damm)
- 1981: Designated a Seattle
historic landmark
- 2000: Closed for historic renovation
and addition; students relocated
to Boren as interim site
- 2001: Nisqually earthquake
damaged lunchroom and
auditorium tower
- 2002: Historic renovation and addition
(Bassetti Architects; BEX I)
- 2002: School nickname
changed to Wildcats
- 2021: Copper finial installed (Stemper
Architecture Collaborative)



West Seattle, ca. 1917 SPSA 019-23

long horizontal exterior, pitched gable roofs, and metal cupola. Built using buff-colored brick and cream terra cotta tiles, it was Seattle's sixth high school in 15 years, and the last of the three high schools designed by architect Edgar Blair. Most of the 409 students attending the first year were girls since many boys had enlisted to fight in World War I or were working.

World War I brought an influx of workers to West Seattle's booming shipyards and steel mills. Enrollment at the high school increased dramatically. By 1923-24, more than 1,200 students attended, which necessitated the use of several portable classrooms and a temporary gymnasium. An addition designed to accommodate 500 more students opened in 1924. This east wing matched the style of the original structure and contained 13 classrooms, a lunchroom, and girls' gymnasium.

A wooden annex with eight classrooms and a study hall was added in 1930 to replace seven portables. From 1935-38, enrollment exceeded 1,800. Artist Jacob Elshin created murals for the hallway entrance to the auditorium depicting scenes of early Seattle as part of a 1937 WPA-sponsored federal art project. The damaged and defaced murals were removed in 1974 in preparation for a remodel project and were subsequently "lost." In preparation for another remodel project in 2000, the murals were rediscovered behind an art cabinet. They were restored by a professional conservator and officially unveiled twice: once on November 12, 2001, to the general public at Seattle Center during the city's sesquicentennial celebration of the landing of the Denny Party at Alki Beach, and again in the school library on August 29, 2002.

With its expanded facility, West Seattle High School continued to grow. By the mid-1950s, enrollment hovered around 2,000. Activities popular in the 1950s included an annual talent show held each March and West Seattle Day.

In 1954, three detached structures were built to the south of the original building, housing industrial arts shops, science labs, music rooms, study halls, and a lunchroom. The old study hall became an auditorium and the lunchroom was transformed into a library named after A. Lyle Kaye, a former vice principal. A new gymnasium was completed in 1960.

Gordon Hannaford served as principal from 1958 until his retirement in 1970. Hannaford started as a teacher at West Seattle High School in 1928 and was a fixture for generations of students. He believed strongly in the equality of women's sports, which led to the creation of a Hannaford Woman Athlete of the Year award.

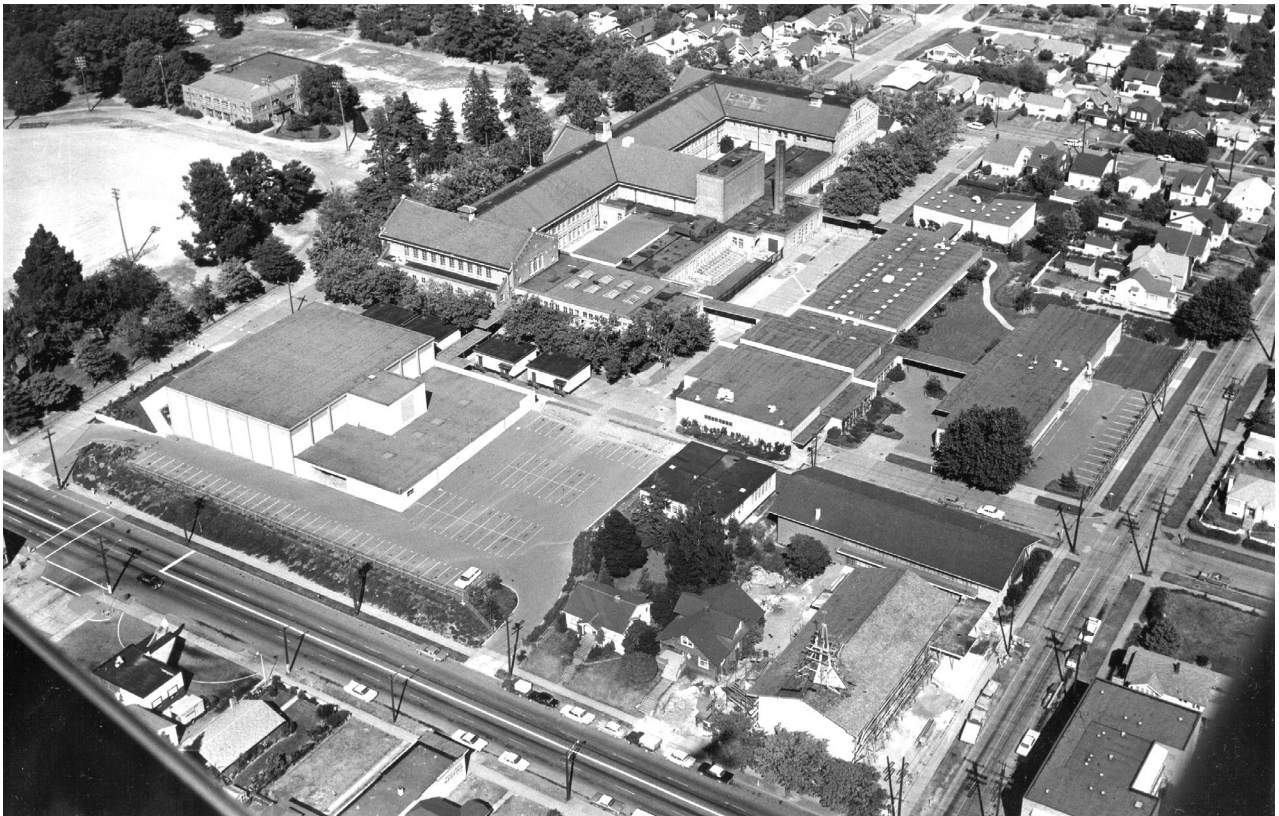
An earthquake in 1965 forced the closure of three portable classrooms and temporary evacuation of the rest of the school. In 1972, the interior of the original building was remodeled, enlarging the library and creating a student activity center. A double portable was moved onto the campus in 1975 to provide space for a preschool laboratory, which operated in conjunction with a parent cooperative preschool.

In 1981, West Seattle High School was awarded landmark status. Two years later, a fire burned a hole in the school's roof, destroying the original cupola. Using specifications from Edgar Blair's original blueprints, which had not been carried out at the time, architects replaced the cupola, adding six feet to the structure's height.

In 1999, West Seattle's assistant principal, Betty Howell Gray, received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Alliance of Black School Educators for her many contributions to minority student programs.

As part of a building evaluation, it was determined West Seattle High School needed extensive renovations to bring it into alignment with other modern teaching facilities and to provide adequate athletic and art facilities. West Seattle was the first historic renovation of a Seattle high school since the 1991 renovation of Franklin, and the first and only historic renovation of a high school under BEX I. Bassetti Architects was selected for the project because the firm handled the Franklin renovation and had extensive experience with historic buildings. Bassetti completed the historic renovation and addition in September 2002, keeping intact the school's historic character. At 223,400 square feet, the facility was double the size of the original and student capacity was set at 1,400.

The project included renovating the 1917 and 1924 buildings and restoring the historic main entrance. A new courtyard entry was added, surrounded by a new gymnasium, theater, and common spaces. The stage



West Seattle, 1963 SPSA 019-10



West Seattle, ca. 1970 SPSA 019-21

proscenium was saved and is still a feature in the commons. Marble was salvaged from around the building and repurposed into stand-up tabletops in the commons area. The existing boys' gym on the west side of the school was demolished, and the girls' gym was made into a library. The original second-floor running track was used to house the building's ventilation system. Classrooms were arranged in clusters to allow for greater cross-disciplinary instruction.

In February 2001, in the middle of the renovation, the Nisqually earthquake occurred. With a magnitude 6.8, the earthquake damaged a portion of the lunchroom and the auditorium tower. Consequently, the tower was demolished, and the lunchroom enlarged. Because the tower was a historic landmark, the replacement structure was required to use materials resembling the original. This work was included in the renovation project.

The project design team won several awards for the historic renovation, including an American Institute of Architects' Washington Civic Design Award of Merit and a Masonry Institute of Washington's Merit Award for Rehab/Restoration, both awarded in 2004. During the renovation, West Seattle classes were held at Louisa Boren as an interim site.

In 2002, the school's nickname, West Seattle Indians, and its Indian chief mascot were retired, a decision unanimously approved by a Seattle School Board vote. Changing the nickname had been considered and rejected several times going back as early as 1989. The school nickname changed to the West Seattle Wildcats.

In 2002, the district renovated and renamed the Chief Sealth sports fields, now known as the Southwest Athletic Complex (SWAC), and they became the home fields for West Seattle High School and Chief Sealth High School sports.

In 2020, when the school's roof was being replaced, the team noticed that the copper finial originally installed atop the school's north-side cupola was missing. The last dated photo showing the cupola with finial intact was from 1963. A new finial was designed using historic photos to ensure accuracy, and custom fabricated in copper. The replacement, installed in January 2021, matches the scale, profile, and historic character of the school.