



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

400 Yesler Building Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 625-4501

June 30, 1981

LPB-185/81

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Property: West Seattle High School  
4075 Southwest Stevens Street

Legal Description: That portion of the school property bounded by the south property line of the Hiawatha Playfield at the north, Walnut Avenue S. W. at the east, the centerline of S. W. Winthrop Street extended westward from Walnut Avenue S. W. to California Avenue S. W. at the south, and California Avenue S. W. at the west.

At a Public Hearing held by the Landmarks Preservation Board on June 17, 1981 the Board voted to approve the designation of West Seattle High School as a Seattle Landmark.

Features and characteristics of the property identified for preservation include:

- the entire exterior of the complex
- the site consisting of the north half of the block bounded by California Avenue S. W., S. W. Stevens Street, Walnut Avenue S. W. and S. W. Winthrop Street.

Designation is based upon satisfaction of the following criterion of Ordinance 106348:

*Section 3.01 (4) It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or period, or of a method of construction; or*

This building, although somewhat neo-Romanesque or modified mission in style, is a marked departure from many of its sister high schools in the City. It is unpretentious, non-monumental in character; it well reflects in its design the internal disposition of functions and spaces; it possesses a marked

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sensitivity of design and explained as outlined in the nomination. It is unfortunate that the siting is rather insignificant; it is easy to pass by it in California Avenue and never notice its existence. The playfield across from the north (main) facade could easily have been more designfully related to it, and perhaps in 1917 the building was more highly visible. Nonetheless, it is an excellent specimen of school architecture.

Issued June 30, 1981



Earl D. Layman  
City Historic Preservation Officer

EDL:dn



LPB-427/80

## City of Seattle

Department of Community Development/Office of Urban Conservation

## Landmark Nomination Form

Name West Seattle High School Year Built 1917  
(Common, present or historic)

Street and Number 4075 S. W. Stevens Street

Assessor's File No. \_\_\_\_\_

Legal Description Plat Name \_\_\_\_\_ Block \_\_\_\_\_ Lot \_\_\_\_\_

Present Owner Seattle Public School System Present Use High School

Address 815 Fourth Avenue North, Seattle

Original Owner Seattle Public School System Original Use High School

Architect Edgar Blair Builder undetermined

**Description:** Present and original (if known) physical appearance and characteristics

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This secondary school complex differs markedly from many of Seattle's high schools in two respects: the siting is not significant, in spite of the open space in front, to the north. When the building was built it was considerably more visible, but the main front faces on a minor street, with major access from the side California street. More in consonance with the development of the City's primary schools, this design employed a non-monumental (palace) approach, with stress on the horizontality of its masses, expression of the internal volumes (classrooms), and even elimination of monumental approach stairs, so that one enters largely at grade.

The complex, two stories in height, of E-shaped plan with low-pitched tile roof, consists on the main or north front of a central pavilion flanked by extensive classroom wings, terminated by an eastern pavilion which is the end of the eastern classroom wing, and by a gymnasium, auditorium volume to the west, with its own north entrance. The central pavilion is terminated at its crossing with the classroom wings by a modest cupola. The entire building is handsomely executed in buff brick and cream terra cotta in modified, neo-Romanesque design. It displays excellent and varied brickwork, combined with lunettes and panels in brick, colored, glazed tiles and terra cotta, combined with handsome terra cotta colonettes, bracketry and panels; handsome iron lanterns and railings.



### Statement of significance

West Seattle High School is significant sociological/cultural aspects as an important element in the community of which it has always been an integral part; this role has not seriously deteriorated with the erection in southwest Seattle of Seattle High School

Architecturally, the complex demonstrates a sane, rational and expressive approach to the function "high school", in contrast, say to such over-scaled institutions as Queen Anne high school.

### History (from Seattle Public Schools History, 1961.)

On the thirteenth of November of 1851, twenty-one people came in a schooner from Portland and were met by two who had arrived weeks before. The beach on which they landed was low and muddy when the tide was out, and the people waded part way ashore. They looked at the one, half-finished, log cabin awaiting them and joked, "By and by, we'll have another New York here!" By and by! They remembered their first dream, and named the beach Alki, meaning "by and by."

West Seattle's big trees brought business for the settlers, but it was hard earned. The beach was so low that the logs could only be floated out in high tide. Even then they had to be scraped along the beach and pushed through the shallow water, out to where the boats could get them. There was a bigger demand for the logs than the growing supply of workers could fill. James Yesler explored around the bay; and when he came back he told his friends of the deep harbor at the very end, a place where the ships could go without building long docks.

West Seattle history slowed down. Most of the settlers left to build their "New York" on a good harbor. Those who stayed saw Alki's great pleasure possibilities. When they went to "town" in boats, or along a marshy, shoreline trail, they told the busy, busy people there about the quiet, sandy beach. The city people came to look--and stay.

All of the children in the community either had to go to Seattle for an education or not have one at all. Finally a Mr. Haller donated a tract of land at 47th S.W. and Walker for School District No. 78's first school. It wasn't too long before West Seattle outgrew the school. In 1893, District 73 bought a lot at California Avenue and Lander Street, which became the first West Seattle Grammar and High School. Most of the pupils in the school were around twelve years old. At that time the school had eight rooms and an auditorium. The attendance was so poor at first that the District considered selling the building. When West Seattle was annexed to the city the attendance increased. Mr. Bailey took over the principalship from Mr. W.T. Campbell, the school's first principal. In 1910 when Mr. Fred L. Cassidy succeeded Mr. Bailey, there were ten senior graduates.

## History Continued

By 1915 the schoolground was dotted with portables, and classes were so crowded that plans were made for a new high school. In September of 1917 the first classes were held in the present building. At this time, during the First World War, our population increased more than ever before. In 1922 there was a staff of thirty-eight teachers. During the year ending in 1923 there was an average daily attendance of 1023 students. Plans for an addition were made. A new wing at the east end of the building--enough for over five hundred more pupils--was ready in 1924.

As the years passed, habits merged into traditions, the faculty was strengthened, scholarship was emphasized, and the foundations of student government were laid. The student body reached and passed the two thousand mark; the faculty increased from 38 to 76.

On November 17, 1954, there was an official dedication upon the completion of a program which included major improvements on the existing structure and the addition of three new wings. The old study hall became a fine auditorium, the lunchroom was transformed into a library and, in the fall of 1960 a new gymnasium was completed and occupied.



Photographs:

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Photographs:



Submitted by: Staff, Office of Urban Conservation

Address 400 Yesler Building, Seattle, WA. 98104

Phone 625-4501

Date 11/7/80

Reviewed [Signature]  
Historic Preservation Officer

Date 11/18/80