

MAE RITA

*West Queen Anne School
Renaissance of a Landmark*



West Queen Anne School Renaissance of a Landmark

Lawrence Kreisman


Published by
West Queen Anne Associates, Ltd. Partnership
Seattle School District
Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority
First Security Realty Services West



© *West Queen Anne Associates, Ltd. Partnership*
All rights reserved

Contents

Introduction	1
Queen Anne Town	3
Early Education in Seattle	7
Queen Anne School	11
From Classrooms to Condominiums	23
Bibliography	28



Acknowledgements

In the course of researching this book, a number of people provided their expertise in the areas of school history, architectural history, and documentary photography. In particular, Eleanor Toews, archivist for the Seattle Public Schools, directed me to School Board minutes, Parent-Teacher Association scrapbooks, annual reports, and the major source for this book — a group of scrapbooks compiled by parents, teachers, and students at West Queen Anne Elementary School. The archivist and Rob Anglin, an architectural historian, read the manuscript drafts and commented on them. Jean Engermann and Frank Green from the Washington State Historical Society Library, allowed me access to original 4 × 5 glass negatives because most of Asahel Curtis' views of school life at West Queen Anne did not exist in print form. Pauline Hanover of the Queen Anne Historical Society, permitted me to go through the society's collection of maps, articles, and photographs. Another member of the society, Leslie Hamilton, reproduced several historic photographs of Queen Anne Hill from his private collection.

Dena and David Dawson did what all good editors do — discarded the extraneous and saved the essence. Finally, Gordon Jones and Val Thomas of West Queen Anne Associates Ltd. were continually enthusiastic and unflagging in their commitment to produce a document that would be a valuable contribution to local history and preservation literature. They have made the writing and preparation of this book a most rewarding experience.

School days, school days,
Dear old golden rule days,
Reading and writing and 'rithmetic,
Taught to the tune of a hickory stick.
You were my queen in calico,
I was your bashful, barefoot beau,
And you wrote on my slate,
I love you so,
When we were a couple of kids.

An engraving depicts the town of Seattle, ca. 1890. Belltown, an early industrial and commercial center directly north of Pike Street, is in the foreground; the forested areas north of Belltown and known as Queen Anne Town, developed rapidly once rail connections with the East were well established and the Klondike Gold Rush put Seattle on the map as the point of departure from the West Coast. E.S. Ingraham, Seattle's first school superintendent, owned the 2 story house on far right. The large building with cupola at top left is the second Central School building at 7th Avenue and Madison Street, opened in 1883.



Introduction

All of us have memories of our grade school days. Most of these vague or vivid memories rarely come to mind. But they can be awakened by some innocuous incident, a smell, a place, or a word.

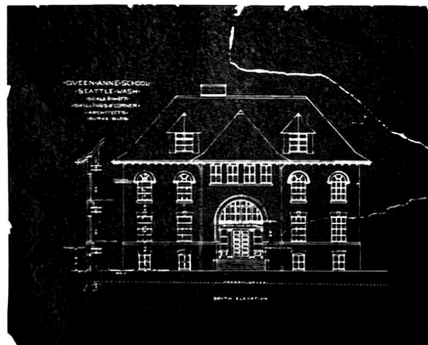
In the summer of 1983, I entered West Queen Anne School for the first time. The school had been closed since June of 1981. Desks and chairs were stacked in the corners of the rooms and along the corridors. My footsteps on the maple floors echoed in the high-ceilinged rooms. Light shone brightly through the tall, multipaned windows and onto blackboards where the final messages of the school year remained. I leaned against a wall and imagined what the school must have been like nearly ninety years ago, when it first opened its doors to girls in starched dresses and boys in pressed trousers and bow ties.

I did not attend West Queen Anne School, but my memories of my own school are doubtless shared by many who did. I remember singing and dancing to the tunes, "Ring around a rosy, Pocket full of posies," and "Bluebird, bluebird, through my window." Boys and girls lined up in orderly rows and were led upstairs to their classrooms by school monitors. Chalk squeaked on the blackboards and eraser fights inevitably erupted whenever the teacher left the room. In

autumn, I kicked leaves on the walk to school; in winter, I donned goshoes and trudged knee deep through snowdrifts. I played hopscotch and marbles during lunch and at recess. My classmates and I watched the wall clock and counted the seconds until the three o'clock bell sounded, signalling freedom until the next morning.

I attended school in New York City. You may have attended school in Steubenville, Raleigh, San Francisco, Tacoma, or Seattle. Yet ours is a common experience. Local residents of Queen Anne Hill who may have attended West Queen Anne School will undoubtedly have immediate childhood attachments to this venerable brick building; but even those of us who haven't experienced it as closely cannot help but be stirred by the evocation of memories of our first school. For that reason, this history of West Queen Anne School, a civic landmark transformed into a different, but no less important, role as housing, can be understood and appreciated by many of us.

But memories and attachments alone are not



Blueprint of original south elevation of Queen Anne School, designed by Skilling and Corner in 1895.

enough to save old buildings, not even those of significant architectural or historic merit. Many potentially useful buildings of great architectural value and community significance have been destroyed in the past fifty years despite the cries of citizens for whom these buildings held special meaning. In some communities across America, the effects of urban renewal were so total that today these cities and towns have hardly any physical evidence of their past. Fortunately, attitudes are changing. The preservation movement, no longer in its fragile infancy, has

encouraged, advocated for, and implemented national and local legislation, including the recent Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981. Such legislation establishes guidelines and enhances the economic value of recycling older buildings into income-producing properties. Investors, developers, architects, and bankers have all benefited from their efforts to creatively and effectively utilize historic properties.

Seattle, Washington has played a leading role in fostering this enlightened attitude. The city earned national acclaim in the 1970s for the success of its

efforts to preserve the irreplaceable historic elements of its cityscape. In particular, the city has served as a national model for its innovative conversions of outdated civic properties, such as firehouses and bathhouses, into offices, community centers, theaters, fine art and dance studios. One outstanding project the city undertook was the complete renovation of a five-block area of public markets. Using a combination of public and private financing, a total of seventeen buildings were rehabilitated over a six-year period in the Pike Place Market Historic District. The project gave an entire section of downtown Seattle a new life while preserving the use and character of an historically established district. Here and in Pioneer Square, the original central business district of Seattle, the city and local investors have turned buildings that might otherwise have been liabilities on the tax roles into income-producing assets to the city and to the community.

Amidst all these preservation and recycling projects, the rehabilitation and reuse of West Queen Anne School is unique. Although a number of projects here and around the country have converted historic buildings into housing, the West Queen Anne School plan is the largest privately financed project of its type undertaken in the Northwest. It may also become a model for the adaptive reuse of surplus schools across America. Preserving such community landmarks will continue to require creative solutions.

In 1984, as it takes on its new function, West Queen Anne School reminds us of its historically significant role in Seattle's transition from a small, unsophisticated milltown of the nineteenth century into a major West Coast metropolis. The chapters which follow highlight the development of the school system in Seattle at the close of the last century, the role of West Queen Anne School in the development of Seattle's North End, its expansion to meet the growing pains of the city, and its current renaissance. In its new residential role, West Queen Anne School will give pleasure to many more generations of Seattle dwellers.



Denny Hill viewed from 2nd Avenue West and West Prospect, ca. 1895. At the top of the hill sits the Washington Hotel; to the left is Denny School.



he fledgling community of Seattle that developed along the shores of Elliott Bay in 1852 centered its economic, social, and political existence around the lumber mill operated by Henry Yesler. From that strategic point, the land was gradually logged and cleared as the township expanded north and east. Although its remarkably steep terrain proved to be a formidable obstacle, the area known today as Queen Anne Hill was the focus of this early development; its timber resources along the south and west slopes could be readily guided to the water's edge by oxen and then floated south to Yesler's mill. However, because of its geographic isolation from the waterfront settlement and the lack of roads or horse-drawn transportation connecting the two, housing on the hill came slowly, and only increased markedly after 1885.

Of the small group of settlers who arrived in the Northwest with dreams of transforming the wilderness into a second New York, two of them, David Denny and Thomas Mercer, claimed large amounts of property in the district that was to become known as

Queen Anne Town

Queen Anne Town. David Denny's land claim extended from Elliott Bay on the west to the south end of Lake Union on the east, bounded on the south and north by present-day Denny Way and Mercer Street. By 1882, he had platted five residential tracts in this area and had constructed a log cabin for use as a real estate office. But Denny's involvement in real estate development was only one facet of an enterprising career that extended into the fields of transportation, manufacturing, finance and banking, and education. As Director of the local Board of Education for twelve years, Denny encouraged the development of schools in the newly developing North End. He went so far as to donate land for the building of a large school in 1884; although the school board decided on a site further south for its building, they named the facility after its benefactor. Denny also donated land for the first city park, a site that served as a public playfield for many years.

Thomas Mercer arrived in the Northwest in 1853. His claim encompassed the land adjoining Denny's north to Highland Drive and bounded to the east by Lake Union and to the west by present-day Queen Anne Avenue. Mercer called his claim on the south-east slope of the hill "Eden," certain that he had found the biblical Promised Land. He built a cabin in the woods and, with the help of the community, he proceeded to cut a road through the forest from Seattle's waterfront to his homestead just north of present-day Mercer Street. This wagon road became the first commercial link between Seattle and the wilds of Queen Anne Town.

A third major land developer, George Kinnear, was impressed by the city's potential for growth when he visited the Northwest in 1874. Although a late-comer, Kinnear has been credited with naming the hill "Queen Anne" after the Scottish settlement in which his ancestor, Kin Near, lived. He bought a large tract of logged land consisting of a four-block wide strip extending from Queen Anne Avenue to Elliott Bay and from West Mercer Street on the south to West Prospect Street on the north. In 1882, he selected a corner of the property for his distinctive,



towered mansion. The landscaped grounds included fountains fed by an extensive water system from natural springs. The system included a storage tank that Kinnear protected within a large park donated to the City in 1889. Kinnear's island of civilized Victorian life contrasted sharply to the underdeveloped, rustic surrounding community. Marauding bears searching for skunk cabbage were frequent, uninvited guests to the mansion grounds during the evening hours.

With the possible exception of its inexhaustible supply of fresh spring water, which flowed from the upland by gravity and through a number of water distributing systems to homes on the lower slopes, life in Queen Anne Town during the 1870s and 1880s presented continuing hardships. Although the first "stage" service connecting Queen Anne Town with downtown Seattle was established in 1880, it operated only as far north as Denny Way. During the next four

years, a horse car service was established extending north from Denny Way along Queen Anne Avenue. By 1891, when the Queen Anne Hill district was annexed to the City of Seattle, the North Seattle Cable Company extended a cable car route north all the way from Yesler Way to McGraw Street, the new city limits. The advent of reliable transit to and from downtown stimulated the development of home sites and businesses on Queen Anne Hill. A major consolidation of the many independent cable car and trolley lines occurred in 1900-03, and an overhead trolley with a counterbalance placed in a tunnel below Queen Anne Avenue operated until 1940. Today many older residents still refer to this Avenue as "the counterbalance."

In the 1860s and 1870s, Queen Anne Hill had been home to a small group of dairy farmers, loggers, and workers in the mills and retail outlets of the cen-

tral business district. Not until transcontinental railroad service began and the Klondike Gold Rush brought recordbreaking numbers of newcomers to Seattle did the Hill become a desirable location. In the early years of the new century, families of wealth and civic importance built grand homes along the Hill's south slope, establishing what remains today as one of Seattle's finest residential neighborhoods. Queen Anne activists even convinced city officials to construct a scenic boulevard and loop road along the crest of the Hill in 1911. By 1920, nearly 20,000 people lived on Queen Anne Hill, and the student age population was able to attend a number of convenient, attractive, and well-planned public schools that would have been the pride of any American city. These schools were a far cry from the one-room wooden shack constructed in a logged clearing in 1890, the precursor of West Queen Anne School.

left: A view of Queen Anne School and environs from the water tower, 1904. In the foreground is 1st Avenue West, the intersection of Queen Anne Avenue and West Galer Street is at lower right.

below: David Denny's devotion to the cause of temperance extended to the naming of many of the streets in his plot. Queen Anne Avenue was known as Temperance Street. But some people claim that the steepness of the street, and not Denny's abhorrence of alcohol, was the reason behind the name. He is said to have remarked, "only a sober man could go up and down that street." In this turn of the century view, work is being completed on the counterbalance for the street car. George Kinnear's ornate home dominates the residential district.





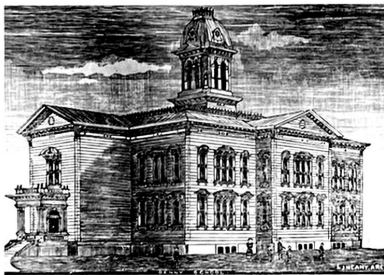
SPSA

Three engravings of early Seattle school buildings appeared in the School District Annual Report of 1889-90:

above: An engraving of Central School, constructed for nearly \$24,000 in 1882-83. The largest school in Washington Territory, this six room schoolhouse had 1200 feet of blackboards surmounted by picture moldings for hanging maps and charts, 600 iron framed seats and moveable desks, a basement furnace providing heat to each

classroom, and sinks on each floor – a luxury never before seen in Northwest schools. upper right: Similar in plan and size to the second Central School, Denny School's exterior was more ornate, using impressive domed belltower. Costing \$45,000, the school was located approximately where the Post-Intelligencer Building now stands. Because of increased enrollments, the school was extended by symmetric additions in 1891. During the regrading of Denny Hill in 1906, one of these

additions was removed, leaving the school a bit lopsided until the entire structure came down in 1929, when the rest of the hill was regraded. right: To replace the burned Central School in 1888, the Seattle School Board insisted on a brick building. Its design, a modified French chateau with an imposing mansard roofed clock tower framed by turrets, provide the city with a distinctive landmark.



SPSA



SPSA

Early Education in Seattle

Belltown School, a typical "shack" school, was constructed in 1876 on the northwest corner of Third and Vine Streets to cater to Northend residents. It served the district until Denny School opened in 1884.



U of W

From initial settlement well into the 1890s, the citizens of Seattle continually grappled with the problem of adequately anticipating and planning for the growth of its school-age population. To the fourteen children who had arrived in Seattle in the early 1850s, the first schoolhouse had been a boarding house built in 1852 on the alley between Front Street and Second Avenue. The Reverend David Blaine's wife took responsibility for teaching the students. Catherine Blaine held school Tuesday through Saturday, because Monday was her washday. Although the school closed during the Indian disturbances of 1855-65, it was reopened later in various makeshift classroom settings. Judge Hanford, who learned to read and spell in the classroom of Edward Clark, later remembered,

My schoolmates of that time were of all ages, from men of forty down to children just old enough to be in kindergarten. Clark had rare ability as a teacher of such a school, and his pupils advanced rapidly. Though usually kind, he kept on hand a supply of hickory gun-rammers, which he applied painfully, as I remember.

right: Denny School at the turn of the century, prior to removal of one of its two symmetric additions.

middle: Recess at Mercer School, ca. 1890. The building of Mercer School came as a shock to Queen Anne residents, who were under the impression that one of the four 8-room schools proposed in 1889 was to be built on the Queen Anne site. Whatever their reasons, the school board abandoned that

idea and purchased land bounded by present day Nob Hill and Valley Streets and Fourth Avenue North for erection of a school. Mercer School was filled to capacity during its first year; it was necessary to erect a four-room addition almost immediately.

far right: A lone school boy waits on the street corner in front of Central School, ca. 1890. The rain slick brick and cobblestone streets with street car tracks can be seen in the foreground.



SPSA



U of W

In 1861, a special act of the Territorial Legislature set apart for school purposes all monies from licenses and fines paid into the King County Treasury. Instead of erecting a school building of its own, Seattle subsidized some seventy-five school-age children to attend classes in a room of the Territorial University building. At a public meeting in Yesler Hall in March 1867, it was resolved that all children of school age in Seattle should be given proper educational advantages, regardless of their ability to pay.

Later, wishing to make the city independent of the university, the citizens voted a tax to raise money for their own district schoolhouse. In 1870, this new Central School was completed at Third Avenue and Madison Street. A simple two-story frame building, it accommodated about one hundred twenty pupils.

In 1873, additional taxes allowed the directors of the school district to purchase lots in each end of the town and erect two buildings of two rooms each, known as the North and South Schoolhouses. At the close of the year, the number of children enrolled in the public schools had climbed to four hundred eighty.

Although a number of Seattle's leading citizens

pointed the need toward larger, more imposing structures to house the growing community, it was some time before their voices were heard. Two more of these "shack" schools were built during the next few years, one in Belltown and one on Sixth Street. By 1879, the school district consisted of two teachers in each of the five schools known as Central, North, South, Belltown, and Sixth Street. None of the buildings had electric lights, telephones, sinks with running water, or indoor plumbing. E.S. Ingraham, head teacher at Central School, recalled the overcrowded conditions:

I found I was to be my own janitor, to sweep the floor and build fires. Old rags for erasers. I bought a yard of Brussels carpeting at one of the two drygoods stores in town and proceeded to make civilized erasers. The old barrel stove had to be heated red to warm the room in winter, nearly baking the brains of the pupils who had to sit near. I enclosed it with a cylinder of zinc, the beginning of a modern heating system.

When we had to have more class room, we climbed to the attic, laid a floor, and put in benches. In arising to recite, the pupils had to lean forward in order to prevent their ideas from being dissipated by bumping their heads against the rafters. Yet it was there that Edmund S. Meany, professor of history in the State University, and John T. Condon, dean of the law school, got boosted on their successful careers as teachers.

The 1880s ushered in a period of extraordinary growth for Seattle, one which forced its residents to consider a shift in the way in which school buildings were planned. The makeshift approach of the past ten years had functioned poorly; one- and two-room shacks could not keep up with the growth.

In January, 1882, Judge J.R. Lewis, addressing the directors of the school district in a rousing speech, spoke of the schoolhouses of Seattle as a disgrace to so "pretentious" a city. He contrasted these school "shanties" with those imposing edifices of other cities.



U of W

Seattle takes the lead in manufactures, in commerce, in enterprise, in wealth, but is way behind in educational matters. Let us make education and commerce go hand in hand. We have had saloon booms and real estate booms, and now, for God's sake, let us have a school boom!

As a result, in April of that year, a tax of \$24,000 was authorized by the voters to build a new six-room Central School at Madison Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues. In August 1883, another similar school building was constructed at Fifth Avenue and Wall Street to replace the Belltown shack school.

With the opening of Denny School in 1885, the district realized its goal to provide ample accommodations for the children of the city — for a short time, at least.

In 1885, Ingraham, newly designated as the first superintendent of city schools, issued his first annual report setting guidelines for the district which had reached an enrollment of 1,478. His strong belief in the practices of the free school system and its benefits are evidenced in these excerpts:

On regularity of attendance: Make the lessons interesting and the school room attractive and the pupils will not care to be absent. Both the citizen and the teacher have

a duty in this matter... The schoolhouse should be the best building in town... The school room itself should vie with the sitting rooms of our best residences in attractiveness. Beautiful pictures and inspiring mottoes should meet the gaze of the pupil whenever he lifts his tired eyes from his book to give them needed rest.

On teachers: Books themselves are to the child but dead things; the teacher should be the living substitute. The expression of her face should be more attractive to the child than any picture and the words she utters should be fraught with truth and beauty. With such attractions thrown about the pupil, he will be neither absent nor tardy.

On moral behavior: Every child must come in contact with the immoral soon or late, and I believe there is no better place for him to meet and overcome the temptations that are bound to beset his pathway than in the public school, under the watchful eye of the teacher. The bright sunlight everywhere pervades the public school... Our school grounds are not surrounded by high walls. Vice and crime do not flourish in the sunlight. No boy or girl dares to attempt any evil practice in the glorious light of the public school. Away from the notion that the child will learn immorality in the free schools of America! Every time the pupil performs a problem in mathematics he learns the great lesson of truth.

Ingraham took great pride in the progressive direction of the school district during his tenure. He saw the completion of the New Central School and Denny School as a reflection of those changes being brought about by new, well-educated and trained teaching staff and an expanded curriculum. "What we have accomplished in so few years," he said, "it would take a staid old New England town as many decades to bring about."



SPSA



U of W

above: A one room shack school was constructed on the site of West Queen Anne School in 1890. Photo shows the first two teachers and their pupils.

left: Miss Mary Estella Brown's first class posed in the second growth timber and undergrowth adjacent to the cleared school site in the spring of 1890. Among the earliest students at Queen Anne were Imogene Cunningham, the internationally known photographer, and Fred Ernst, founder of a major Northwest hardware business.

Queen Anne School

a significant role in the establishment of an education system in Washington Territory long before the Queen Anne neighborhood won its school in 1890. In 1861, under the legislative act establishing a territorial university, the government stipulated that a total of two townships of unappropriated land could be selected and sold to help establish that institution. The legislature designated Seattle as the site and land was donated and cleared close to downtown for erection of the first university building. In order to raise funds for the construction of this building, the commissioners selected a large parcel of land, including the Queen Anne School site, and sold it for \$1.50 an acre for the benefit of the university.

From that time until 1889, the site on which the Queen Anne School was to be constructed lay dormant, surrounded by second-growth wood, brush, and the simple homesteads of early settlers. In July of 1889, the Director of the Board of Education authorized the purchase of sites for four schools, one to be located in Queen Anne Town, a second in the Madison Street area east of Central School, a third in the southeast section of the city, and a fourth in the area east of Lake Union. The Queen Anne site was purchased for a reported price of \$10,000 in August of that year, with a down payment of \$2,000. The lot was bounded by Gaylor Street (now Galer) and Lee Street and by Anna and White Streets (now 5th and 6th Avenue West).

The board requested a well-respected local architect, Charles W. Saunders, to prepare plans and cost estimates for four school buildings; they were to be frame buildings of similar size with identical floor plans and equipment. There would be eight rooms, four on each of two floors above a full basement. The only noticeable differences would be in the design and finish of the exterior trim. Bids were invited and opened, but were found to exceed the estimate of the architect to such an extent that they were all rejected.

By this time it was late in the year, with the rainy season approaching. The board decided not to undertake the work on the large schools until the following spring. However, recognizing that it would create

B

y 1889-90, the city of Seattle school district had grown to sixty-three teachers in twelve public schools with a total registration of 4,374 out of an estimated school-age population of 7,500. The city could boast of a university, a high school and numerous grammar schools, and a major commercial district feverishly rebuilding in brick and stone from the ashes of the 1889 fire. However, north of the settlement of Belltown, Queen Anne Town was still very much a wild, undeveloped area of forest, meadow, and unpaved roads. Children living on the hill had to make a long and arduous trek each day to the Denny School at Fifth and Battery Street in Belltown. A petition by parents was finally heard by the School Board for the erection of a neighborhood grammar school, though controversy over costs led the board to reject the original plans for a major school and substitute another temporary shack school. It took over five years, until 1896, before Queen Anne residents got a permanent building on the site.

Ironically, the wooded environment surrounding and including the Queen Anne School property played



SPSA

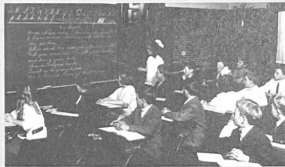
Portrait of Mary Estella Brown, one of Queen Anne School's first teachers.



SPSA

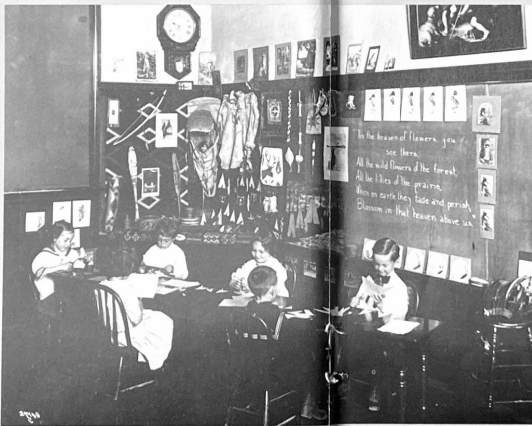
Miss Lizzie Hill who, along with Mary Estella Brown, taught in the shack school, was photographed at a 1945 Fifty-fifth Anniversary celebration at Queen Anne School.

Asahel Curtis, whose documentary photography from the turn of the century until his death in the 1940s provide outstanding glimpses of earlier days in Seattle, made a number of visits to West Queen Anne School, in 1904, 1905, 1909, and 1914. His classroom photographs reveal the diversity of programs offered and the kind of appealing environment it provided for its students.



WSHS

A class in language and punctuation, 1914



WSHS

Children do cut-outs in a classroom filled with Northwest Indian artifacts and photographs, 1914



WSHS

The first "portable" in the Seattle school system was located on the West Queen Anne School grounds; originally, it housed the home economics class, May 1909



WSHS

Children learn about language with the help of a basket filled with objects, 1914

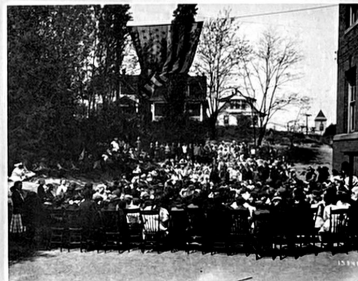
The original brick Queen Anne School building, constructed in 1895, had its main entrance facing Lee Street. Galer Street is on the far right, defined by a fence. Its simple design included Roman arched windows, shake roof, and dormers. This picture, probably taken in 1900, includes the two room addition onto the north end.



SPSA



A four room addition, planned in 1902, was designed to match the south end of the school, making for an almost symmetric facility. This picture shows recess on the school grounds in April 1905.



A Memorial Day observance is held on the lawn of West Queen Anne School. May 1909

WSHS

It was here, in a section still almost unclaimed from the virgin wilds, that the few families in a sparsely settled district then known as Queen Anne Town first welcomed their own school.

None of the block was graded at the time, nor were there any surrounding graded streets or walks. In February, 1890, shortly after the school opened, a contract was awarded to one Joseph Rogers for the clearing of the site at a cost of \$450. Apparently, part of the block remained wooded, for in April 1891, the board permitted local residents to cut and clear the site for firewood.

The new Queen Anne School was inadequate from its start; within a very few days after the school opened with Miss Grace Martin as the instructor of two grades and twenty pupils, the attendance had increased to forty-four. An additional class, the third grade, was added. Miss Lizzie Hill was transferred from Madison Street School, taking over the second grade on February 2. A partition was erected to

hardships to ask the younger children on Queen Anne Hill to attend Denny School, and responding to pleas from residents, a one-room building was approved for Queen Anne Town as a temporary relief school until plans could be firmly drawn for a permanent structure on the site.

The one-room shack school opened on January 20, 1890. It was constructed, as others had been, with a board floor, vertical 1 x 12 siding — the cracks between the boards covered by battens to keep out the wind — a roof, four windows on each side, and a single door. In the words of one early-day resident of Queen Anne Hill,

It clung precariously to a small clearing which was hurriedly slashed from the blanket of second growth fir, alder, and maple left after the original logging operations. In nearly every direction were woods and a blanket of brush, briars, ferns, and undergrowth that had attained prodigious proportions once the larger trees had been removed.

divide the school into two rooms. In 1945, returning to the school for its 55th anniversary, Miss Hill recalled the teaching environment then:

My memory pictures of 1890 were of tall forest trees with a woody trail from a road, now Queen Anne Avenue, to an unpainted two room schoolhouse in a clearing in their midst. The huge branches of the trees that had been cut down were lying all around. . . . But the children were eager, bright-eyed like those of today. They sang the same songs, studied the same books, wore clothing similar to children in Eastern cities.

Miss Martin resigned her post during the first year, and was succeeded by Miss Mary Estella Brown, a graduate of the well-known Potsdam Normal School in New York, who had been hired by "correspondence." She arrived in Seattle in December 1889 and was immediately put in charge of a class in what was known as Broadway School. Early in the spring of 1890, she was transferred to Queen Anne School, where she taught second grade.

For the next five years, the two-room Queen Anne School functioned as a "relief school" for the lower grades, the older children being expected to attend the much larger Mercer School on Fourth Avenue North between Nob Hill and Valley Streets. During September 1891, there were fifty-seven pupils registered at Queen Anne School. Board records for the period 1893-94 indicate that \$9.13 was spent for building maintenance. This included the purchase of five glasses, six shades, one wash basin, one mop, and one coal bucket. This same year, the board had the building insured for \$400, with \$400 additional insurance for its contents.

In 1895, monies were obtained under a special levy for school construction and the school board decided it was time to relieve the Mercer School congestion by finally building the long-promised Queen Anne School. Architects were asked to submit plans for a six-room school on Queen Anne Hill. On the basis of their design for a brick and stone building,



WSHS

above: A stair landing makes a makeshift study hall for some of the pupils. 1914

right: As a feature of the "nature studies" which she introduced to classes at West Queen Anne, Miss Pollock devoted time to instructing fourth grade students in the construction of bird houses, which they took home and used during nesting season. April 1905.

Warren P. Skillings and James M. Corner, local architects, were selected to supervise the project. Prior to submitting plans for the school, Warren P. Skillings had already achieved some prominence among Seattle architects as winner of the design competition for the Washington State Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

For Queen Anne School, the architects designed an urban, up-to-date red brick building that represented the latest styles being exploited in New York, Chicago, and the railroad centers of the midwest and west — Richardsonian Romanesque. They were undoubtedly influenced by Seattle's own commercial district, newly built after the 1889 fire in the prevailing Romanesque style. The schoolhouse shared with these commercial buildings a simple, dignified brick-and stone-trimmed facade, with both semiround and segmented arched window openings. The building's furnishings, its large sash windows and its facilities for both students and staff reflected progressive attitudes toward public education at the close of the nineteenth century.

Again, plans for a permanent Queen Anne schoolhouse were foiled. Bids received for construction were rejected by the board, as they had been in 1890, because all of them exceeded the amount earmarked for the work. The architects were instructed to revise their plans; alternatives for the slate roof and stone masonry were found. In late August 1895, the school board opened bids for the same building with a cedar shingle roof and less stone work, and awarded the general construction contract to Shannon and Ryan on their low bid of \$15,574. The building was to be two stories in height with a full basement. There would be three school rooms on each floor, with stone trim and stone steps. The contract provided for the completion of the building in time to open for the spring term of the following year.

The contractor, however, does not appear to have finished the structure as specified in the contract. For it was not until June 1896 that the school board accepted the structure and authorized a final payment. A separate contract for grading and leveling the north

end of the site was authorized shortly thereafter. The school building had been designed with expansion in mind and it underwent three additions as the district grew. A two-room addition in 1899 and a four-room addition in 1902, built onto the north end of the original building, extended it into a generally symmetrical "U" shape that completed the original design by Skillings and Corner. In 1916, Edgar Blair, the City Architect, was responsible for the design of a ten-room south wing and auditorium that was placed perpendicular to the main building and was joined to it by a stair hall. Blair's sensitive detailing of the newer portion of Queen Anne School is evident in his borrowing from the design elements of the original. In particular, a series of blind arches above rectangular window openings allude to the semiround arched window openings in the older section. Nearly identical materials, including sandstone sills, and similar hipped roof forms with carved outriggers under the eaves make for a harmonious joining of old and new.



The formative years of Queen Anne School (1890-1900) parallel the development of a progressive education system in Seattle schools. It was a period when great improvements in programming were being applied in the lower grades. According to Clarence Bagley in his *History of Seattle*, "this was a period when pupils were given something to do to cultivate perception and imagination instead of just sitting still and studying." The entire school system of the city was centralized in terms of methods and purpose, and instruction in every branch of studies was revolution-





WSHS

above: Adelaide Pollock, principal of West Queen Anne School, was an avid naturalist and introduced her pupils in the third grade to the art of weaving baskets and other articles from "raffia," a fiber from the Ralfia palm. Photograph is one of a number taken by famed Northwest photographer Asahel Curtis.

right: In this drawing class, students demonstrate their understanding of the concept of the "power of selection" by narrowing their field of vision in the selection of a part of the picture. 1914

middle right: Making measurements and playing a card game make the exercises in arithmetic class more interesting. 1914

far right: Classroom walls were covered with reproductions of well known art works; plaster models of famous sculpture, such as the Winged Victory, were commonly found in schoolrooms. May 1909

him, that you are interested in what he is doing every moment of his life. It's not merely a daddy as a source of supply that he needs, but one who manages, somehow, to live his child's life with him.

The outbreak of World War II directed the course of activities and programs at the school. A Junior American Club, formed by students in the fourth through eighth grades, had charge of rallies and flag ceremonies conducted at a miniature Victory Square set up on the school grounds. The rallies helped raise money for war bonds and school bonds. There were also periodic scrap metal drives to help in the war effort. The war left many households without wage earners and brought additional hardships to students' families. Mothers had to find work, and children, both boys and girls, had to take more responsibilities in the home — cooking, cleaning, and repairing. A new teaching program at West Queen Anne School, called the "Flexible Method," responded to these needs by making studies more relevant to daily living skills. Workshops allowed the youngsters to see practical applications of their studies in mathematics, art, science, citizenship, and English. The cramped industrial arts and home economics rooms in the basement were remodelled to provide facilities

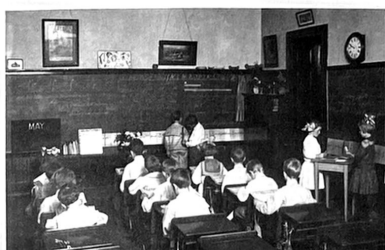


WSHS

for seventh and eighth graders. These workshops stimulated the use of the hands as well as the mind. An article on the front page of the *Seattle Sunday Times* of November 26, 1944 praised the program:

The seven dwarfs will have to move over to make way for the West Queen Anne youngsters when it comes to workshop industriousness. The efforts are noisy but strictly business. The room presents a scene of boys and girls heating metals at a forge, remodelling a sewing machine into a potter's wheel, soldering metals into Christmas gifts, sawing plywood into various shapes for a miscellany of articles . . . Elsewhere in the room, block printing, painting, sketching, carving, clay modelling, and activity with a drill press result from the freedom of self-expression.

"In the past, school has been devoted to the fellow with a fine mind," according to Claude Turner, principal. "Every youngster has some interest and ability. It is up to the schools to help him find his interests and abilities and provide the means for his development, perhaps not to the highest degree of skill, but to the point where he

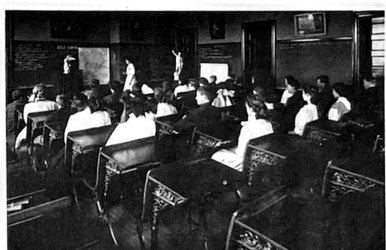


WSHS

derives enjoyment and a feeling of success. In the past, schools have neglected the child with manual skill."

West Queen Anne School enrollment grew and shrank with changes in the neighborhood and the construction of new schools nearby. It was at the bursting point, with 643 children, in 1918-19. In the 1920s and 1930s, enrollment averaged 500-600. By the 1940s, the number of children in the school had dropped to between 350 and 400. In 1954-55, the seventh and eighth grade classes were moved to Queen Anne High School, where a junior high program had begun. The 350 students remaining at West Queen Anne represented kindergarten through sixth grade. In 1977, the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classes were eliminated, and for the remainder of its years, the school housed kindergarten through third grade classes only. Also in 1977, a follow-through program, an offshoot of the Head Start program, began busing about 140 central-area children to West Queen Anne for classes. In 1981, when the school closed its doors, only 116 students were enrolled.

The teachers, staff and principals who occupied the building during its later years loved its "quant" atmosphere; for them, it provided a warm, positive environment. There was pride in working in a school



WSHS

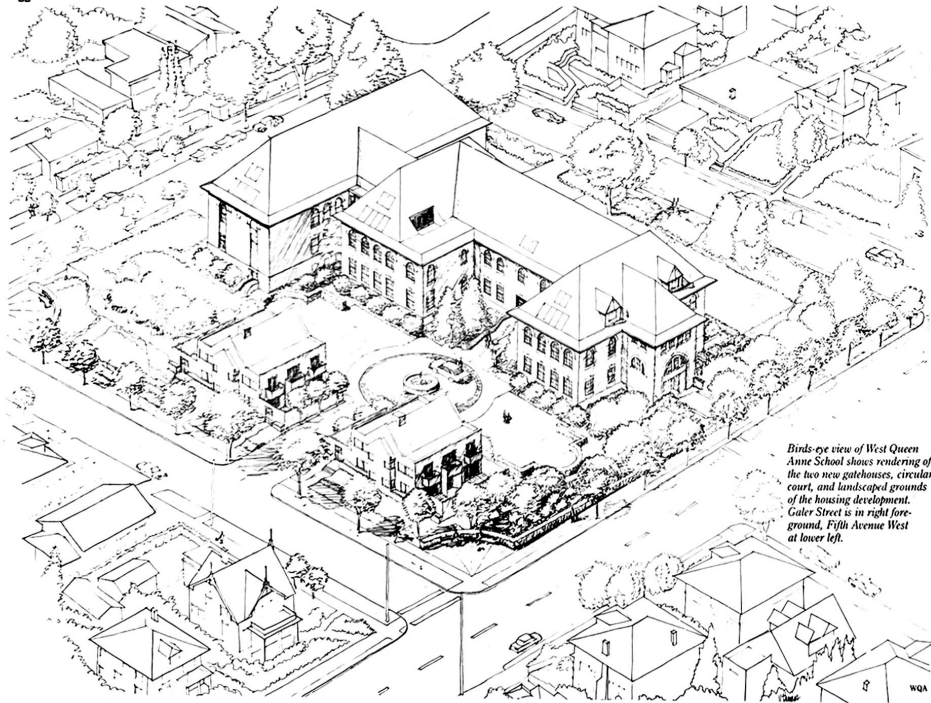
with such a long tradition in education. In fact, the stability of the residential neighborhood surrounding the school resulted in as many as three generations of families attending the same grammar school. West Queen Anne was a school where attachments were made and kept, and where even the principals were not above a bit of mischief and childlike behavior on occasion.

John Moffitt, principal from 1971-74, recalls that on Halloween each year, he and one of the teachers planned a prank to scare the unsuspecting pupils. While she told tales of goblins and spirits, Moffitt climbed to the attic and jumped on the floor, rattling the lighting fixtures in the ceiling of the room below. Sometimes, he even rattled snow tire chains for the desired effect. By the third year, most of the students had caught on to Moffitt's part in the scheme, so they were understandably shocked when the principal walked into their classroom during the commotion. Of course, Moffitt had arranged for the custodian to take over his traditional "ghost" role in order to fool the pupils.

For nearly ninety years, the halls, classrooms, and playgrounds of West Queen Anne Elementary School had served the needs of its hilltop community. It wore its age proudly, gracefully; when the doors closed in 1981, its interiors were still in remarkably

fine condition. The beautiful old stairway at the north entry to the building, the handsome wainscoting in the classrooms and corridors, and the solid maple floors did not show the expected scuffmarks and scratches of the thousands of youngsters who had attended. The Seattle School District had certainly done a commendable job of maintenance through the years. But students and faculty had also quite obviously treated their school with a great deal of respect. The complete absence of graffiti or vandalism, even after it sat vacant for two years, is an indicator of the proud tradition West Queen Anne School represented to its neighborhood. Perhaps, in a small way, the lyrics of the school's song reflect this sense of pride and value in a building where the process of education was highly valued.

West Queen Anne Forever
We'll be true to you.
Schoolmates all together
We'll cheer for you
And try to do our best.
We must keep our standard
High above the rest.
Rain or shine we'll work together.
Never mind the kind of weather.
Hail to West Queen Anne.



Birds-eye view of West Queen Anne School shows rendering of the two new gatehouses, circular court, and landscaped grounds of the housing development. Gater Street is in right foreground, Fifth Avenue West at lower left.

From Classrooms to Condominiums

T

he population of Seattle grew from 250,000 in 1910 to nearly 400,000 by 1930; from then until 1980, an additional 100,000 settled into the city. During the post-World War periods, the so-called "baby booms" kept the school district well-enrolled. But during the 1950s, a new phenomenon — the suburb — was emerging, spurred on by the widely established use of the automobile and the proliferation of superhighways. The building of the Mercer Island Floating Bridge in 1940 led the way for the development of the Eastside communities; an additional bridge completed across Lake Washington in 1963 made Redmond, Kirkland, and other previously isolated towns open for single-family residential development. The ability to commute quickly from northern suburban communities was accomplished by the completion of the Interstate 5 freeway in 1962. As a consequence, many larger families moving into the metropolitan area, as well as former Seattle city residents, chose to live outside the city limits where larger, more modern housing was available on more acreage, and where regional

and neighborhood shopping centers offered all the conveniences of the city with few of the parking problems or traffic congestion.

The consequences of these changes were many-faceted. In terms of the public schools, particularly, the 1960s and 1970s were critical. Seattle's population base shifted from couples with large families of school-age children to single adults and professional couples with fewer children. As the birth rate declined, fewer schools and fewer teachers were needed to handle the decreasing enrollments. Ultimately, the school district made decisions to close underutilized facilities in an attempt to save money. Older, less efficient buildings, such as West Queen Anne School, were scheduled for closure. In order to protect the building from possible demolition, members of the Queen Anne community nominated the building to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 — it became the first school building in the city so designated. In 1977, it became a City Historical Landmark. Despite continuing efforts on the part of parents, teachers, and neighborhood residents to have the school remain open, West Queen Anne Elementary School was determined by the district to be "nonessential" and ordered vacated after the spring 1981 term.

The Seattle School District turned its attention to finding new uses for its stock of empty buildings. In 1981, it established a separate Property Management staff, directed by Michael Carroll, whose function it was to provide continued community access to these closed facilities while earning rental/lease revenues for support of ongoing district programs. Their staff report of June 1982 indicated that 19 schools were under short- or long-term leases, one was in the process of sale, and five were in the planning stages for disposition. The Property Management staff worked with city agencies, public and nonprofit organizations, and the community in planning for the reuse of these closed schools. Some now provide a variety of interesting programs and community resources, including studios, a day care center, a preschool, an arts center, and an alternative school. Other "nonessential" facilities are planned for

development into retail stores, office space, and multifamily housing.

In the case of West Queen Anne School, as soon as the school board had made its disposition known, the school district initiated a number of public meetings in the Queen Anne community. Working with a consultant, the district and community members discussed various kinds of uses for the site; housing appeared to be the most desirable use. Several options were examined, including the demolition of the building and replacement by single-family units on the site. However, neighborhood residents heartily endorsed a residential plan that included preservation of the building.

Coincidentally, Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, a Washington-chartered public corporation with a record of purchasing, rehabilitating, and reselling or leasing historic properties, expressed interest in acquiring the property from the school district. Lawson A. Elliott, Director of Historic Seattle, selected Val Thomas, a Seattle architect and partner in the firm Cardwell/Thomas, to plan development of the site. Thomas, a former resident of Queen Anne Hill, had become familiar with the school on his walks through the neighborhood. He had seen the potential for this vacant, stained building, with its chain link fencing and lifeless character, to be turned into a delightful living environment that took advantage of its nineteenth century architectural details, its close-in location, and its magnificent views. In a relatively short time, his firm had prepared carefully designed plans for a housing development that respected the architectural values of the building, its historic significance to the city, and its importance socially to the community.

The firm of Cardwell/Thomas and Associates, Architects, had a depth of experience in historic renovation and in new housing construction. The principals in the firm, Richard Cardwell and Val Thomas, had met while working on the rehabilitation of the Pike Place Market Historic District buildings—a painstaking process of refurbishing and modernizing a large number of arcades and commercial structures

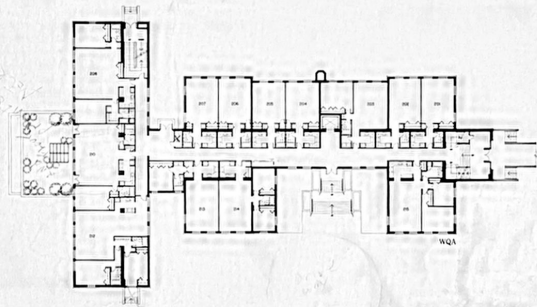
from the early part of the century without disturbing the unique market atmosphere that Seattle's residents and tourists alike felt was vital to the well-being of the downtown. The firm's work on West Queen Anne Elementary School would call into play an equal sensitivity to the building's history, its architectural details, and its physical relationship to the surrounding streets. While not wishing to disturb the school building's overall character, Cardwell/Thomas recognized the need to re-form the 1/4 acre site into an appealing residential community. The interior spaces would have to be transformed from school rooms into "homes"; the asphalt and concrete playground would become gardens and landscaped grounds; the site would have to provide parking spaces for residents and guests. Not the least of the problems posed by the conversion was making it work financially. Although a number of historic properties around the country had successfully been converted from warehouses, school buildings, mills, and fire stations into housing, nearly all of the larger projects combined public and private funding. The conversion of West Queen Anne School into living spaces would be one of the largest privately financed ventures of its type in the country.

The complex financing package, including a \$3.8 million construction loan, was provided by First Security Realty Services/West (formerly SIMCO). The lender specializes in historic properties, and its investments in Seattle have included the restoration of the Arctic Building (1916), the Alaska Building (1912) and Heritage Building (1904). First Security saw the West Queen Anne project as an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the community and to historic preservation while taking part in a sound economic investment.

In early February 1983, a lease/option agreement was negotiated between Historic Seattle and the Seattle School Board, whereby the property would be acquired under a long-term lease from the school district. As a public agency, Historic Seattle was able to acquire the property without competitive bidding for the public purpose of insuring the building's preserva-

tion. The term of the lease, 99 years, included the option to renew for another 99 years. Title of the building was conveyed with the lease. Historic Seattle, after adding protective covenants insuring that the school would be preserved in perpetuity, conveyed its option to acquire the building to West Queen Anne Associates, a limited partnership formed for the express purpose of project development. Val Thomas became general partner in charge of project management.

Because of the unusual nature of the project, additional steps had to be taken before construction could begin. The developers applied for and received a conditional use permit in June 1983, based on the landmark provisions of the Seattle zoning code. In addition to the rehabilitation of the main building, the



above: Typical floor plan of studio, one- and two-bedroom units. Kitchens and bathrooms were developed from former corridor space.

below: A cross-section view shows the two-storey high attic units and reveals the change in scale from school building to gatehouses to residences on neighboring street.



5th Avenue West

Gatehouses

West Queen Anne



Taking part in the groundbreaking ceremonies at the site are (left to right) former Superintendent of Schools Dr. Donald Steele and West Queen Anne Associates Limited partners Gordon Jones, Carole Patmore, Karen and Bill Evenden.



Architect Val Thomas monitors progress during the construction phase of the project.

architects proposed four gatehouse residences be built that would provide more income-producing units on the site and make an aesthetic transition in scale from the brick schoolhouse to the one- and two-story residences in the adjoining streets. But the gatehouse designs required a re-zone to overlay the landmark use. The school was also a Seattle City Landmark, and any changes required the approval of the Seattle Landmarks Board, which oversees city-wide historic sites. The board approved of the project in June 1983. Because of its listing on the National Register, planned improvements to the buildings required the approval of the Department of the Interior; this preliminary certification was granted in September 1983. With the paperwork completed and all necessary documents approved, groundbreaking for the \$4.3 million project occurred on October 17, 1983, with the first units expected to be occupied by August 1984.

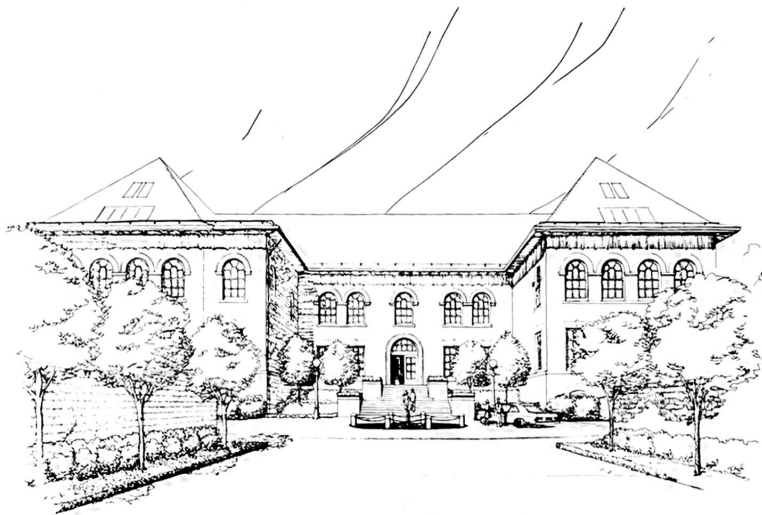
The architectural solution for the conversion of the West Queen Anne School site derived from a respect for the architecture and a recognition of the formality of form and plan of the Romanesque structure. The former playground has been transformed into elegantly landscaped gardens sited over a new 55-space underground garage. The approach to the main building from Fifth Avenue West passes between two gatehouses, built of brick with detailing to match the existing building, and with private walled gardens. A paved circular court, centered between the wings of the 1895-1902 section of the building, is flanked by formal lawns surrounding a central fountain. From the court, a formal staircase rises to the new front entrance to the building.

Forty-nine units, both one- and two-story, range from 600 to 1400 square feet on the four levels of the renovated structure. At the basement level, the floors have been raised and the outside ground level lowered to allow each unit to have French doors onto its own private garden. There are seven studio and three one-bedroom apartments on this level, as well as an impressive 2,500 square foot unit with 15-foot-high ceilings carved from the school auditorium. The two principal classroom floors, with 13- and 14-foot-high

ceilings, vertical fir wainscoting, and wall moldings, each provide for eight studio/one bedroom units and five two-bedroom units. In the attic, where the peak of the roof rises to more than 25 feet, 12 units, five one-bedroom and seven two-bedroom, have living rooms with cathedral ceilings and decks cut into the existing roof. Many units in the building have superb views of the city skyline, Mount Rainier, Elliott Bay, and Mount Baker.

While providing a new elevator and main entrance and reducing the extremely wide original corridors in order to allow for kitchen and bathroom cores, the architects have generally attempted to salvage and focus on the turn-of-the-century-building's handsome wood details. They have saved the original stairway, the old lighting fixtures, and the hall wainscoting. All window trim and wainscoting have been left in living units; when moldings have been removed from some part of the building, they have been used on new interior walls. The resulting units, with their graceful arched windows, fir woodwork, maple floors, and views of the city are warm, inviting environments that reflect a 1980s lifestyle while incorporating the craftsmanship and materials of the turn of the century.

Opportunities such as those at West Queen Anne Elementary School exist for other surplus or "nonessential" properties, allowing them to become useful once again. But to succeed in such ventures requires a very special combination of ingredients. In the case of West Queen Anne, it took a neighborhood that loved its school enough to become involved in its preservation and reuse; a school district with the foresight not only to support but to play an active role in the process; a public development authority to provide the vehicle to acquire the property and insure its sensitive redevelopment; a lender with a strong commitment to the social and financial advantages of rehabilitating buildings of historic significance; and finally, an architect/developer with the design skills, the ability to work with the community, and the vision to accept the risk of such an unusual and challenging project.



Architect's perspective view from the gatehouse to the circular court, staircase, and new main entrance to the building.



Bibliography

Bagley, Clarence. *History of Seattle*. Chicago, 1916.

Bowden, Angie Burt. *Early Schools of Washington Territory*. Seattle, 1935.

First Annual Report of the City Superintendent.
Seattle, Washington Territory, 1884-85.

Histories of the Seattle Public Schools 1869-1974.
Seattle, 1974.

National Register of Historic Places Nomination form:
Queen Anne Public School, Prepared by Elizabeth
Walton Potter, May 8, 1975.

Queen Anne Historical Society Archives.

Seattle Public Schools Archives: West Queen Anne
School Scrapbooks.

Seattle Schools: The First Hundred Years. Seattle
School Board, June, 1969.

Photographic Collections:

Asahel Curtis Photography Collection,
Washington State Historical Society,
Tacoma, Washington.

Photography Collection, Northwest Collections,
University of Washington, Seattle.

Private collections: Leslie Hamilton
Seattle Public Schools Archives

Photo Credits

- | | |
|--------|--|
| WSHS | Asahel Curtis Photography Collection,
Washington State Historical Society,
Tacoma, Washington. |
| U of W | Photography Collection, Northwest
Collections, University of Washington,
Seattle. |
| LH | Private Collections: Leslie Hamilton |
| SPSA | Seattle Public Schools Archives |
| WQA | West Queen Anne Associates, Ltd. |

Design: Virginia Hand Graphic Design
Typesetting: Typographics
Printing: Frayn Printing

