

Lafayette

Name:	Lafayette Elementary School	Enrollment:	435
Address:	2645 California Avenue SW	Nickname:	Leopards
Configuration:	K-5	Colors:	Yellow and black



Lafayette, 2000 ©Mary Randlett SPSA 239-19

The first school near the Admiral district in West Seattle was Freeport School, which operated in the early 1870s in the sawmill community of Freeport Duwamish Head. The next school in the area east of Alki was Haller School, which opened in 1892. The portable schoolhouse measured 26 feet by 40 feet and was built on 0.21 acres donated by G. Morris Haller at what is now 2123 47th Avenue SW.

In 1893, a new building was constructed by West Seattle School District No. 73 to replace Haller School and handle the growing West Seattle school population. West Seattle School resembled a castle, with a tall belltower and tiny spires at the corners of the roof. The school opened with just 20 students in a single classroom. It was also called the Brick School or West Seattle Central School because it served all of West Seattle. A high school was started there in 1902 under Principal W.T. Campbell, and so it was sometimes called West Seattle Grammar and High School.

Unaware that the area's population would grow, some West Seattle residents grumbled that the \$40,000 school was too large because only two of its eight rooms were in use. They reasoned that the building should be sold. According to Campbell, representatives of Whitworth College of Spokane desired to buy the building for \$20,000. After considerable debate, a proposition was placed on the ballot and residents

Name: **West Seattle School**
Location: California & [S]W South
Street [Lander]
Building: 8-room, 3-story brick
Architect: n.a.
Site: 2.3 acres

1893: Opened in September by
West Seattle District
1908: Annexed into Seattle School
District on July 1
1909: Addition (James Stephen)
1917: Renamed *West Seattle*
Elementary School
1918: Renamed *Lafayette School*
on November 7
1941: Addition (Naramore
& Brady)
1946: Site expanded to 4.6 acres
1949: Closed by earthquake
on April 13; 1893
and 1909 portions
demolished in August
1950: 20-room brick addition (John
Graham & Co.) opened in
September
1953: addition (Graham)



West Seattle, 1916 SPSA 239-12

voted to keep the school. Even the school's belltower was left without a bell until some time after May 1903 when the West Seattle Improvement Club suggested using the bell from the Haller School.

Enrollment at West Seattle School did grow. The former Haller School building, used since 1893 as a church and community center, was moved to the West Seattle School site in 1907 and used as an annex. (In the late 1980s, the building survived as the east wing of the American Legion Hall at 3618 SW Alaska Street.) In 1909, an addition of eight classrooms was made to the north end of the building. By 1911, the school was so full that the Seattle School District built Jefferson School just east of the West Seattle Junction.

In 1917, the high school classes were moved to the new West Seattle High School. To distinguish the two schools, the grade school was now called West Seattle Elementary School. A year later the name was changed to Lafayette to honor the Frenchman who assisted the Americans during the Revolutionary War.

In the original construction of the school, there was an open well about 12 feet in diameter in the second floor hall. A railing encircled the hole, and children marched around it while passing to classes. A piano stood at one end, providing music in the hallway. At Christmas time, the children sang carols around the well.

In 1923, the top of the belltower was removed. The third floor, which had been the high school gym and auditorium, was condemned because of inadequate fire exits and never used again. At this time, eight portables were in use. In 1925, a portable gym was brought in from West Seattle High School. The upper grades were organized in the platoon system and attended physical education classes in the new structure instead of their usual recess. In fall 1929, the 7th and 8th grades were moved to Madison Intermediate School, and kindergarten was added at Lafayette. Enrollment dropped from 1,008 the previous year to 895.

Around 1935, the open stairwell was closed to make better use of the space and prevent noise from rising to the second-floor classrooms. In 1935, the PTA launched a campaign for a new school, citing the condemned area, ventilation and heating problems, and an unsatisfactory lunchroom. The condemned floor fascinated the school's younger children, one of whom recalled, "The big kids told us all sorts of stories



Lafayette, 1960 SPSA 239-17

about why you couldn't go up to the third floor—like about all the evil things that would happen to you.”

The PTA didn't get a new school but, in 1941, an addition was made by bricking the sides of the gym portable and adding a music room. During World War II, the Home Guard drilled on the Lafayette grounds. William A. Blair retired in 1945 after serving as Lafayette's principal since 1923.

On April 13, 1949 an earthquake struck Seattle. Lafayette was damaged beyond repair, with the exception of the gym addition. The three gables of the building crumbled, piling bricks on the sidewalk. Sections of walls fell out, leaving gaping holes. Fortunately, the earthquake took place during spring vacation. For the balance of the school year and the following year, the 850 Lafayette students were sent to various sites in West Seattle.

A new building was built on the same site, but it wasn't ready for another year, so students continued to attend other schools for the 1949–50 school year. The kindergarten classes were housed in two houses on property purchased for enlarging the Lafayette site.

The new building was single story of Roman brick facing. Two portables were needed immediately and another was added in December. Three additional portables were added later. A new six-classroom wing replaced these portables in 1953.

In September 1955, six sets of twins (three fraternal and three identical) registered for kindergarten at Lafayette. At the time, it was believed to be the largest number of twins ever to register for the same grade in a Seattle public school. The pairs were separated and taught in different classrooms.

In 1957, Morel Foundry presented the school with a handsome bronze plaque of Marquis de Lafayette, designed by sculptor James Wehn and cast by Morel. It was affixed to the wall in the front hall so it was visible from California Street.

In 1958–59 Lafayette had 1,240 students, requiring the use of seven portables. For many years, Lafayette was one of the largest elementary schools in the Seattle School District. The 1975–76 school year was the first since 1950 that portable classrooms were not in use.

The school was paired with Dunlap during the desegregation era, beginning in 1981. Grades 1–3 went to Lafayette while grades 4–5 went to Dunlap.

Today Lafayette has a diverse student body with bilingual, special education, accelerated, and regular academic programs. A fine arts program provides daily sessions in vocal music, visual arts, and drama. A 90-member student choir performs year round, and the award-winning jump rope team performs locally. Students from West Seattle High School assist as tutors at the school and citizens in the Admiral business district have formed a strong association with the school.