

## Briarcliff

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A portable annex for grades 1–2 opened in 1912 to relieve overcrowding at Lawton School. Its location between two north-south ridges atop Magnolia Hill suggested its name, Pleasant Valley Annex. One early Lawton principal hiked through the woods daily to visit this outpost.

Pleasant Valley closed in 1926 with the impending opening of Magnolia School. In 1929, the Seattle School District purchased a larger piece of property some 6–7 blocks to the west, which also bordered on Dravus Street, in anticipation of adding a high school there.

Two decades after Pleasant Valley closed, Magnolia School was overcrowded. In October 1947, citizens from the Magnolia neighborhood met with the school board to discuss the possibility of building a new elementary school in the area. Choosing a site was not a problem. Although the 33rd Avenue W site had been sold, the Dravus Street site was undeveloped.

Heralded as an “architectural innovation...the first of its kind in the country,” the newly planned school was a “transportable” building made up of rooms that could be attached or detached from a concrete central corridor. In response to fluctuating enrollment, the classrooms could be moved to another like school in the district. To this end, two other buildings of the same type, Genesee Hill and Arbor Heights, opened the same year.

The site sat upon the western Magnolia ridge, thus necessitating a different name. The change from Pleasant Valley to the less euphemistic name Briarcliff was accompanied by start-up problems. The district intended the original configuration of six classrooms and an office to be ready for the start of the school year in September 1948. Unfortunately, obstacles, including a shortage of workers and materials, forced Briarcliff’s K–3 classes to begin the year in half-day sessions at Magnolia School, while 4th graders had morning classes in the Magnolia auditorium and afternoon classes in a vacant room there. Even when it opened, the building was far from complete. During the first year, students were sent home twice, once because of a furnace failure and a second time for a sewer failure. In fact, it took workmen the remainder of the school year to finish the facility.

Briarcliff was built without a cafeteria and lunchroom because virtually all targeted pupils lived within a half-mile radius and therefore could be sent home for lunch.

The expanding student population on Magnolia forced the board to authorize two additional rooms for the school 25 days before Briarcliff even opened. These rooms were ready for the start of the 1949–50 school year. The addition of another two classrooms and connecting corridors set to open in September 1951, however, failed to meet the deadline. That fall Briarcliff became an independent school with the addition of a kindergarten and grades 5–6. The delay in finishing four more classrooms meant that grades 2–5 were double-shifted for the first six weeks of school. It wasn’t until early April 1952 that a brick building containing a cafeteria and gymnasium/auditorium was finished, allowing the principal and secretary to move out of the nurse’s room into their offices in the new wing.

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Name: **Pleasant Valley Annex**  
 Location: 3238 33rd Avenue W  
 Building: Portable

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1908: Property purchased  
 1912: Opened as annex to Lawton  
 1920–22: Second portable in use  
 1922: Became *Pleasant Valley School*  
 1926: Closed  
 1941: Property sold on May 9

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Name: **Briarcliff School**  
Location: 3901 W Dravus Street  
Building: 6-room expandable,  
wood frame and reinforced  
concrete  
Architect: George Wellington Stoddard  
Site: 4.58 acres

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1949: Opened on January 31 as  
annex to Magnolia; addition  
(Stoddard) opened in  
September  
1951: Became independent school;  
addition (Stoddard) opened  
in October  
1952: Addition (Stoddard) opened  
in April  
1978–84: Joined by Hawthorne  
students  
1984: Closed  
1987–89: Temporary site  
Present: Used for district storage

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While the transportable building looked glued together and left some parents with a “cold” feeling because of its many hallways, the design did have some benefits. Each of the classrooms had its own outside exit. Thus it was safer in an emergency and the hallways were quiet because they were rarely used by students.

Even with these expansions, the school could not keep up with increasing enrollment. In 1952–53, because of a shortage of space, the 4th and 5th grades were moved into classrooms at Blaine Junior High. The 5th grade classes were able to return to Briarcliff the following year with the addition of two portables, use of the auditorium as a classroom, and triple shifting of the kindergarten. The following year, 1954–55, another portable was added and the 4th grade was able to return. A new portable was added in each of the three subsequent years. The enrollment hit a high of about 645 in 1957–58.

The Briarcliff site is dominated by the blue water tower across W Dravus. Dogwood trees, planted earlier by the school district in the parking strip, died in the freeze of November 1956. In their place, three pink and three white flowering cherry trees were planted, each set in honor of Japanese pupils who attended Briarcliff while their fathers served as the Consul-General of Japan in Seattle.

The number of pupils at Briarcliff gradually decreased to about 500 in 1963–64 and leveled off at about 320 pupils in 1972–73. As part of the district’s desegregation plan, in September 1978 Briarcliff received students in grades 1–4 bused across town from the recently closed Hawthorne. Although only one staff member (Carol Postell, who taught 1st grade) made the move from Hawthorne to Briarcliff, the operation at Briarcliff School, including the PTA, was renamed Briarcliff-Hawthorne. Over the years, it emphasized the arts. The school



Briarcliff, 1960 SPSA 206-4



Briarcliff, 1960 SPSA 206-3

became K-6 in 1982-83 after the closure of Blaine. In 1983-84, the combined student population was steady at 310.

The school was finally closed in spring 1984 due to a district consolidation policy as district-wide enrollment declined. The Hawthorne students were sent to Blaine, while students from Briarcliff and Magnolia, which closed the same year, were transferred to Lawton and Blaine. During the construction of a new building for Lawton (1987-89), the students from that school relocated to Briarcliff.

Briarcliff is currently listed as a nonessential property by the district and will be used for furniture storage until a decision is made concerning the site.