

"RAINIER BEACH" is a name that goes back to pioneer days of Seattle and has since identified several Park Department facilities in the area: a bathing beach at the "end" of Kepler Street from 1920 to 1936; a playground adjacent to the Emerson Elementary School was so named from 1910 to 1965 when it was renamed in honor of the famed Fred Hutchinson; and the 1968 Forward Thrust park bond identified a pool/playfield need for the Rainier Beach community and this site was chosen in cooperation with the School Board in 1971 and officially named in the 1974 dedication "RAINIER BEACH COMMUNITY CENTER/ POOL and South Shore Middle School/"

An old settler told the School Board historian that on a September afternoon in 1869 a covered wagon drawn by a white horse and a bay mule were making their way south from Seattle on a road along (Beacon Hill) when young George Dunlap climbed a tree and saw a flat valley below crossed with several creeks flowing into Lake Washington (so named in 1854). His parents, Joseph and Catherine Dunlap, decided it would be a good homesite and built a cabin on what is now the NE corner of Henderson and 50th. The road on the hill was the old Snoqualmie Trail so they built a large corral for the use of drivers bringing their herds along the trail to Seattle markets. Their home became a stopping place for travelers, too. Just east of the homestead was a large swampy area extending to the lake and northward, between (Pritchard's) island and the shoreline: it became known as "Dunlap Slough". Joseph Dunlap was a native of New Hampshire (b. 1816). He married Catherine Henderson (for whom Henderson St. was later named), an Iowa girl and they farmed in Iowa until the "Westward Ho!" fever got them. They followed the wagon trail across the Plains.

Other settlers were attracted to this valley and several chose a site on the south rim of Dunlap's Cove and Lake Washington. But they called it Rainier Beach. The portion of valley that these settlers had chosen was actually the southern end of a long straight valley that extended all the way to First Hill in Seattle, six miles away. By some rare design (coincidence, if you must) the Ice Sheet of 14,500 years ago had so aligned the valley that it afforded a spectacular view of Mount Rainier along its entire length. So "Rainier Valley" became a spectacular choice for some enterprising developers/realtors to plan the route for one of the "new toy" trolley cars right down the Valley from the center of Seattle (Pioneer Square district). In 1889 the trolley went as far as Columbia City, another pioneer community. Soon the car tracks were extended to Rainier Beach and by 1896 the trolley cars went to Renton. As planned, the novel little cars carried both home owner and prospective buyer and often pulled freight cars as well, so the Rainier Valley district real estate really sold and developed. The district was annexed to Seattle in 1907.

By this time Joseph Dunlap's farm acreage had been divided into realty tracts, one of which was subdivided as Atlantic City with a park platted on the north rim of the cove. A court judgment awarded it to the City in 1907 (Ref: Atlantic City Park)

In 1908 the Olmsted Bros. of Brookline, Mass., prepared a "Supplemental Report" to their "Comprehensive System of Parks and Parkways" for Seattle, in which they recommended both a "parkway" (boulevard) and "playfield" in the Dunlap Canyon which must have run southwesterly up over a "saddle" and down to the Duwamish River.

The Dunlap family donated the old homesite (at Henderson and 50th) for the purposes of a new 4-room school in 1904, replacing the original one-room school built in 1898 at Kenyon and Rainier. So it was named Dunlap School and was replaced with the present building in 1924.

In 1910 a playground site was acquired along the west side of the new (1903) Emerson School and was named Rainier Beach Playground - confusing, because it was four blocks from the lake. Of course, kids were swimming in the lake and the community petitioned

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the Park Board for bathing facilities at Atlantic City but the Board held back because the lake was becoming by sewer outlets discharging just offshore. Finally, the Board yielded and in 1922 established a "bathing station" on a "small pile wharf" at the foot of Keppler Street. It must have been a fairly new wharf, for the lowering of the level of the lake by 9' with the opening of the Ship Canal in 1917 would have left an old wharf too high above the water for use by the public for swimming. Since there is no item in the beach financial statement to cover wharf construction, it could have been built by the Engineering Department for unloading street improvement materials. Anyway, this facility was also named RAINIER BEACH! And the confusion must have continued until Pritchard Island Beach was acquired in 1934 and the Keppler Street wharf abandoned two years later, upon development of Pritchard. The name "Rainier Beach" continued to identify the PG - but then in 1960 waterfront property north of Carver Street was transferred to the Department and named - yes, "Rainier Beach Lake Park Cottage Tracts" but remained undeveloped. The PG name was changed to Hutchinson in 1976 but two years later Forward Thrust picked up the name and in 1971 identified this site as Rainier Beach PF.

Actually, this site has been considered several times. In 1927 Mrs. M. C. Hulbert proposed the donation of two large parcels for playfield use: to the south and east of the new (1924) and present Dunlap Elementary School. (*) Two years later the Department proposed a 5-acre tract across the street from the school and called it "Dunlap Playfield." Then, the "second" site of the Dunlap School was considered in 1944 but the School District was considering the location of junior high in the vicinity and would not release the site. By 1952 the Park and School Boards together with the Planning Commission were studying together the recreation, school and, later, the City office needs of the Dunlap neighborhoods. However, the School District proceeded and in 1958 constructed the Rainier Beach Junior/Senior High School between Atlantic City Park and Rainier Avenue. But there were still unmet school needs for the Rainier Beach community, so joint planning did continue. The Forward Thrust committee identified the Community as the site for an indoor swimming pool.

Planning and design studies indicated economic advantages in combining recreation center, pool, school and playfield into a total project designed to complement each other. Design development proceeded but cost estimates were excessive and the project went back to the drawing board. Meanwhile the potential students attended class in portables at the junior/senior high school. The new school was complete by year-end 1973, was named South Shore Middle School, and was a new design - a one room school, only this time the room is an acre and a half in size and reflects the open-concept school with areas of study. The Park Center and Pool were finished by the following spring but doors remained locked. A student protest over the "lockout" was explained as "budget cuts leaving no money to hire a staff." This was a similar problem with Forward Thrust projects, for no funding was provided for staff or maintenance. Formal dedication by the School and Park and Recreation Department was in September 1974.

(*) An 80-acre golf links was proposed - and endorsed by the community - between Seward Park Avenue, South Cloverdale and Rainier Avenue, N + S + E + W)