

SOUTHWEST COMMUNITY CENTER AND POOL - History

One of the prominent natural features of West Seattle is the long valley sloping from the Duwamish River tideflats up to the "saddle" just to the south of this site, then sloping steeply down to Seola Beach. Originally gouged by the Vashon Glacier 14,500 years ago, the valley was further cut as runoff drainage and springs developed a stream that was named Longfellow Creek (possibly named by a homesteader, Ferdinand Schmitz, who gave evidence of an admiration for the poet when he successfully proposed the name for Hiawatha Playfield at a later date). The headwaters of Longfellow Creek were nearby in a group of springs that were enclosed in a drainfield when Roxhill Park was developed in 1969. Longfellow Creek was a major feature on a map of Seattle in 1894 and the flow of the stream was considerable until the development of West Seattle with streets and sewers which diverted the natural runoff and tributary springs.

Another prominent natural feature was the wide tidal flat of the Duwamish River which was a real barrier to the development of West Seattle in an age of horse and wagon and canoe. The only road to the town that was founded on Duwamish Head from the settlement on the shore of Elliott Bay was along each side of the meandering Duwamish River to a bridge at the town of South Park. However, the potential growth of the area was recognized by its annexation to Seattle in 1907.

The "pioneer settlers" in this vicinity were loggers, cattlemen and farmers. The logging camp on the east side of the saddle and creek's headwaters eventually became the town of White Center. (ref: Seola Park) A group of summer cottages along the beach of Fauntleroy Cove soon developed into a year-round community.

The first schools serving West Seattle were in the Duwamish Valley (near King County Airport) and at Alki; the West Hill Elementary in 1913, West Seattle High School in 1917, E. C. Hughes replaced West Hill in 1926; Denny Junior High School was built in 1952 and Sealth High School in 1957. (Sealth is an alternate spelling for Chief Seattle, for whom the City is named; Denny honors the leader of the pioneer party which landed at Alki Beach in 1851.)

The 1968 Forward Thrust program identified the need for a swimming pool and "field house" in Central West Seattle near Sealth. After site studies by this Department and the Department of Community Development, and with community approval, the pool and recreation center were located adjacent to Denny, providing a combination of Junior/Senior High Schools, indoor and outdoor recreation - a true community center. Because of project priorities, construction did not commence until spring 1974. That December the first to take a plunge into the new pool was the roof which caved in either due to an overload stacking of building materials or to defective beam materials.

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