

Burbank

The origins of Luther Burbank School date back to 1890 when Major Cicero Newell and his wife Emma started a semi-private residential school in Seattle (in a rented house on East Union Street and 35th Avenue) “in an effort to aid neglected, indigent, and unfortunate children.” The Boys’ and Girls’ Industrial School was operated by the Boys’ and Girls’ Aid Society under a board of directors that included a number of leading men of the city. Overcrowded, the school was moved to a large rented hotel on Mercer Island, then called East Seattle.

In order to provide an education for the children, Newell sought assistance from the Seattle School Board in March 1901. The following month, the board agreed to maintain a school “furnishing teachers, books and supplies and to pay [King] County a reasonable rent for rooms or building used for school purposes.” That same month, the board agreed to purchase land on the northeast shore of Mercer Island for the site of a district-owned and -operated parental school, with the condition that the property could be legally placed within the limits of the Seattle School District. (Parental schools were residential schools where school-age youth who were headed for delinquency were sent to be reformed.)

In September 1901, the Newells returned with 40 boys and girls to a rented building in Seattle called The Pontius Residence (500 Second Avenue N). There they opened the Industrial School with Major Newell serving as principal and Mrs. Newell as matron. Major Newell took the boys to the Mercer Island site during the summer of 1904 where they lived in tents. This experience was hampered by an outbreak of diphtheria, but fortunately all of the children recovered. In 1905, the state legislature passed a bill authorizing cities over 50,000 to establish parental schools under the newly formed Juvenile Court.

The Parental School opened on June 10, 1905, with a ceremony attended by Seattle’s mayor and school board. The school had two buildings, and the upper floors were used as dormitories. A third building was added in 1908. Sixty boys and girls attended and were taught farming, housekeeping, and academic work up to the 8th grade. Because of his wife’s ill health, Major Newell retired soon after the opening of the school, and William and Minnie Baker became superintendent and matron. They served in this capacity until 1909 when Willis and Martha Rand succeeded them. Mr. Rand served as superintendent until 1942, completing 38 years with the school.

Under Mr. Rand’s supervision, the school continued to expand. In 1914, a hospital, laundry, and barn were constructed. During the same year, the girls were transferred to a school of their own, the Parental School for Girls in Ravenna. Enrollment at the Boys’ Parental, as it was then called, was 84 students. The site was expanded by 50 acres between 1920–25. In 1921, an additional cottage was built to the north. To relieve crowded conditions and reduce fire danger, a brick dormitory in the French Provincial style and a central heating plant were constructed in 1929.

The Boys’ Parental School housed boys aged 9–17 who were committed to the school by the Juvenile Court of King County. It operated under a semi-military system, with the boys organized into three com-

Name:	Parental School
Location:	8400 SE 24th Street, Mercer Island
Building:	Wood
Architect:	n.a.
Site:	16 acres (increased to about 100 acres)

1905:	Opened on June 10
1908:	Addition (n.a.)
1914:	Renamed <i>Parental Home for Boys</i>
1929:	Addition (Floyd A. Naramore)
1931:	Renamed <i>Luther Burbank School for Boys</i> on November 6
1957:	Closed in Seattle School District; leased to the state
1965:	Closed as a school
1969:	Site sold to King County
Present:	Luther Burbank County Park

panies, each led by a captain and lieutenant. A brass band of 27 boys played for military maneuvers and entertainment. Parts of the grounds were devoted to agriculture, with the boys preparing the harvest for meals in the kitchen.

In 1931, Boys' Parental School was renamed Luther Burbank School for Boys to eliminate the stigma attached to the name "parental" and to provide inspiration by association with a person of high ideals. The Luther Burbank School, with an expanded program, accepted not only boys from Seattle and King County but also from other neighboring counties. It was linked to Seattle by ferry from Leschi until 1939 when a floating bridge was constructed.

An average of 200 boys attended the school from 1942 to 1948, although enrollment never reached that number at any particular time. In 1944, Burbank's enrollment peaked at 137 students. The average stay was nine months. The classrooms resembled those of any other Seattle Public School but with a smaller class size. Testing, in which the students ranked second in the district in IQ scores, demonstrated that the students there were, for the most part, "boys of good intelligence from bad backgrounds." Services offered by the school included diagnostic service from the child guidance department, curriculum revision, parent and school relationships, placement, and follow-up. Seattle was one of the few cities in the nation where a school district provided this type of program. Detroit and Chicago also had similar schools.

The school's agriculturist, James C. Johnson, retired in 1944 after working there for 29 years, teaching dairy farming, animal husbandry, and gardening. He observed, "Taking care of the horses is the job they all want, so I make them work up to it through poultry, truck gardening, pig-feeding and milking."

In September 1954, the school board ordered the closure of the school because the acceptance of students from outside the district "imposes on Seattle taxpayers an unfair and inequitable expense." On July 1, 1957, the Seattle School District relinquished operation of Luther Burbank School to the State of Washington. The state agreed to

Burbank, ca. 1940 SPSA 391-22 and SPSA 391-24



pay \$50,000 annual rental on Burbank and Martha Washington School combined and to reimburse Seattle schools for supplying teachers. At this time, a portion of the property was sold to the Mercer Island School District.

Luther Burbank School operated as a school until 1965, at which time the boys were transferred to Echo Glen. In 1968, a state legislator proposed the site be turned into a “racially balanced educational park.” King County purchased the site in 1969 and has its parks department administrative offices there. In addition to the 1929 dormitory, the steam plant and the foundation of a dairy barn survive.

