



The Valley View

Newsletter of the Greater Madison Valley Community Council

Issue 81, January 2000

E-mail: madisonvalley@juno.com

President's View

by Gary Emslie

With the start of a New Year and new century, we all have the opportunity to reflect on the past (its good and bad aspects) and plan and hope for a better year. While we may have ended 1999 with political turmoil on our streets (WTO), and homeless and hungry neighbors living outdoors in record numbers, we still had many of our hard working neighbors striving to help those in need. The New Year brings with it the hope of growth and prosperity.

Many of our neighbors set goals for the new year or make resolutions. Let us resolve to help our neighbors in

need. For some of us that may simply start by saying hello to the neighbor up the street that you haven't met yet. For others it might be helping your aging neighbor with the inevitable mess of wet winter leaves in the gutter. For others, it may be the offer of a ride to the bus stop. The specific act isn't really as important as the resolve to reach out and help someone else.

It's time again to think of our schools. While we don't yet understand all of the fallout from I-695, I think it's prudent to think of our schools and their students and teachers. How can one neighbor help? Easy. Martin Luther King school can use your talents. Volunteer in your school today.

Our next community council meeting will be this next Tuesday, January 18, 2000, at 7:30. Hope you'll

join us and help to set the Council's agenda for the year 2000.

We're still looking for people interested in creating an art show and sale. The proceeds will go to help the M. L. King school. Wastewater, drainage, traffic and parking, Arboretum plans, parks and their upkeep and use, jet noise, safety, city services, are but a few of the other topics neighbors will struggle with in the coming year. Join us to make our neighborhood the place you want it to become. ▼▼

In This Issue

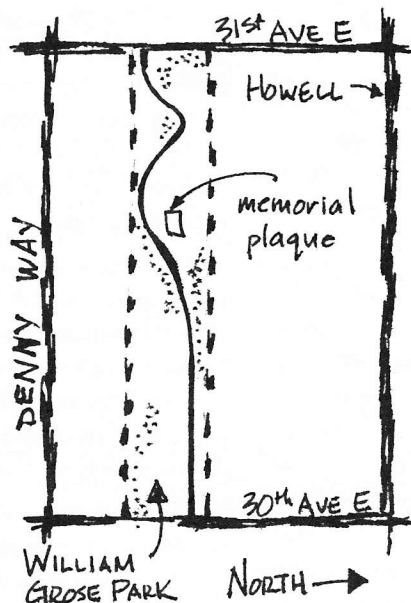
President's View	1
William Grose Park	1
Where Are We Headed?	3
Announcement: Arts and Crafts Festival... 4	

William Grose Remembered at William Grose Park

by Miriam Roskin

The grandest public park within Greater Madison Valley is, of course, the Arboretum. However, our neighborhood is also home to three other small city parks. In this and two future articles we will examine each of the three parks in turn.

William Grose Park is a sliver of greenspace that carves a channel between 30th and 31st Avenues East, midblock between East Howell and East Denny. It's a rarity, being one of the few parks in Seattle that doesn't occupy even one street corner. Its shape, covering four residential lots within a standard square city block, bespeaks its origins as a later edition to Seattle's broader park plan.



The park was established fewer than 30 years ago under the direction of Walter Hundley, Director of the Seattle Model City Program. The park originally bore the geographically accurate yet imaginatively impaired name of 30th Avenue East Park. Within 10 years of the park's founding, over 20 members of the Madison Valley Concerned Citizens Organization submitted a petition to the City requesting that the park be renamed after William Grose, one of Seattle's first black pioneers. Today the park is a quiet place for reflection, but still falls short of the active children's play area originally envisioned by Mr. Hundley in the early days of the 1970s.

(Continued on page 2)

William Grose Park, continued

Early Beginnings

Who knew how hard it could be to create a new park? The earliest record of any thoughts toward creating a park on the block where William Grose Park sits today dates back to 1941. A neighborhood resident named John Carlson asked the City to rezone the property as parkland, so that it could accommodate a children's playground. The City rejected the request, citing the proximity of Madrona, Garfield, and Washington playgrounds.

The idea was resurrected in 1968, when Seattle began participating in the national Model Cities Program and investigated new capital projects to improve the quality of life in our city. In 1970 Walter Hundley described the site at 30th Avenue East as an area where "many children now play in the street and in vacant lots. A well-designed park with high-class equipment will keep the youngsters off the street and provide greater safety."

But it was not to be so simple. Several neighbors opposed the park, citing concerns about litter, crime, and noise, and they went so far as to threaten a law suit. Mr. Hundley again championed the creation of a park on the site. His handwritten marginal note on an interoffice memorandum dismisses the opponents' threats: "I think we should proceed with our plans. Allow the group to go to court if they wish. My information is that a children-hater and a disappointed land buyer are causing the trouble.... Refer the noisy ones to me."

However, the alleged children-hater got his way – for a while. The City backpedaled on the 30th Avenue East site, pending a thorough survey of neighborhood opinion. By 1971 the survey was complete and the Seattle's Board of Park Commissioners reactivated the project. The site was set aside as parkland, but none of the amenities originally envisioned – merry-go-round, teeter-totters, climbing areas – were installed.

Rejuvenating and Renaming the Park

By 1982 the Madison Valley Concerned Citizens Organization – the forerunner of our own Greater Madison Valley Community Council – secured a \$31,000 federal grant for improvements to the park. A letter from the MVCC notes that "Since the City of Seattle acquired these parcels for the purposes of constituting a neighborhood park, the land has laid fallow and has been little used, year after year." The improvements were modest – minor grading and drainage work, a bench, and an asphalt pathway – but they made it clear that this was in fact a park. Still, the

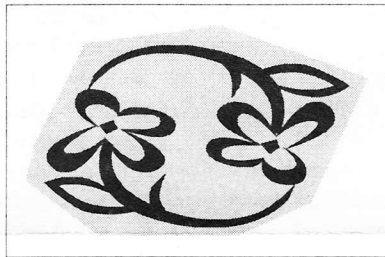
park had no real name.

The Concerned Citizens – including our own Charles McDade! – now petitioned the City to rename the park after William Grose. "It is a name," they wrote, "that honors and acknowledges the important role that black people played in settling and developing Seattle's communities, especially the Madison Valley." The Black Heritage Society of Washington State joined the MVCC in the call, and in 1983 the whole neighborhood enjoyed a picnic and outdoor dedication ceremony for the rejuvenated park.

The Namesake

One of the park's real benefits is that its name prompts curiosity as to its namesake. Born in 1835 in the Washington, D.C. area, William Grose was active in the underground railway, helping to spirit Southern slaves to freedom. He served in the Navy and traveled extensively; one destination was Panama, where he worked to persuade officials not to send escaped slaves back to the American South.

By 1860 Mr. Grose's travels brought him to Seattle, reportedly as only the second black resident of the city. By 1883 he opened a restaurant and hotel called Our House near Pioneer Square, and sold it for \$5,000 soon before the Great Seattle Fire of 1889. The hotel burned to the ground. As testament to Mr. Grose's honesty and generous spirit, several sources report that he soon reimbursed the buyer for the full sale price.



A year before opening Our House, Mr. Grose bought property in an outlying area, far, far beyond the city center: 12 acres between 23rd and 27th Avenues, between Howell and Olive, on the southwestern border of Greater Madison Valley. The total sale price was \$1,000, paid in gold direct to Henry Yesler. Mr. Grose established a ranch on the property, and by 1889 was operating the ranch in earnest with his son George, raising livestock and selling produce as a truck farmer. He also subdivided some of the land and sold properties to buyers of all colors, but especially to blacks, who at times had difficulty buying into quietly segregated neighborhoods elsewhere in town. By the 1900s this neighborhood known as "East Madison" had the highest concentration of African American residents in Seattle.

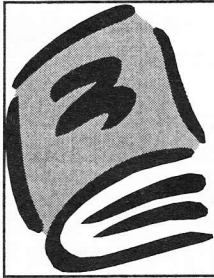
According to Esther Mumford, past president of the Black Heritage Society of Washington State, Grose's home at 24th and Howell became one of the most important gathering places for Seattle's black community in the 1890s, second only to the First African Methodist Episcopal Church. Reports from a few years back informed me that the house still stands at 1733 24th Avenue East, so I went to see it. But all that remains is an empty lot.

William Grose died on July 27, 1898. Ms. Mumford reports that attendance at his funeral was so high that 16 carriages were not sufficient to carry all of the mourners to his final resting place at Lake View Cemetery. ▼▼

FOR MORE INFORMATION

In researching this edition's article on William Grose Park, I came across several excellent resources for anyone interested in learning more about black history in Seattle or city parks.

Seattle's African American community throughout the latter half of the 19th century in Seattle comes alive in *Seattle's Black Victorians: 1852-1901* by Esther Hall Mumford, published locally in 1980 by Ananse Press (P.O. Box 22565, Seattle, WA, 98122). Ms. Mumford offers individual chapters on migration, professional life, education, religious life, and several other topics. The book also includes many good photographs and reproductions of handwritten letters, newspaper articles, and advertisements. Also of interest is Ms. Mumford's *Calabash: A Guide to the History, Culture, and Art of African Americans in Seattle and King County*, also published by Ananse Press.



The best source I've found for in-depth information on Seattle parks is found within the City of Seattle Municipal Building. Call ahead to the City Archivist to make a reservation and identify the park you'd like to know more about. Visit Room 104 of the Municipal Building for access to folder upon folder of correspondence, City Council records, invoices, memoranda, and architects' notes, all related to individual public parks within Seattle's city limits.

And what if you want to learn more about black history and city parks all at the same time? Look no further than *Tribute: Seattle Public Places Named for Black People*. This wonderful little book is written by Mary T. Henry and illustrated by our own neighbor (and Mary's daughter-in-law) Marilyn H. Henry. It discusses parks like William Grose Park here in Madison Valley, Al Larkins Park (in Madrona), and Powell Barnett Park (on Martin Luther King Way between East Jefferson and East Powell). It also provides biographical information on the parks' namesakes. (Did you know, for instance, that Powell Barnett was a leading force in establishing the East Madison YMCA? That he was not only an ordinary working man who laid street car lines and helped build several downtown hotels, but also established the Leschi Improvement Council in 1967? That he played the sousaphone and was the first black person to become a member of the previously all-white Musicians Union? I didn't.) *Tribute* also deals with arts centers, gardens, clinics, schools, and libraries named for noteworthy African-Americans. It's published locally by Statice Press, P.O. Box 22198, Seattle, WA, 98122.

—M.A.R.

People of Seattle: Where Are We Headed?

by Jack Irwin

David Brewster asks this in a column in the Times. Once we were a place of modesty and restraint where our kids could afford solid old houses. Now we are beholden to forces of big money; huge downtown projects and stadiums rise against a background of neglected neighborhoods and failing public schools. Rudeness on the road grows in proportion to the myriad of heavyweight cars crowding the streets. Are we going to displace our middle income families after driving away all the poor?

Brewster's hope for our future has its appeal (for me and how many others?): build a coalition to elect a working-class mayor who would promote manufacturing jobs to compete with overseas producers, revive the public schools, assure medical insurance, assist first-home buyers, provide low-cost or free transit. That leadership would eschew tourism and "world-class destination" boosterism because they only add to congestion and do not bring living wage jobs. How to pay for all this? Tap money from the high tech beneficiaries of the swollen stock market. Ironically, Brewster notes, I-695 assures that the only taxes that WILL pass are those on the rich or on business. We must have a city where we can all afford to stay and have a civil life together.

There are still rewards here: witness the popularity of Seattle Art Museum's months-long show "An American Century of Photography." The variety and force of all these images attracted thousands of people. There were portraits, landscapes of the great west and cities, scenes of war, celebrities, misery and hilarity, realism and abstract beauty. I went twice; on the last day of the exhibit, January 9, the ticket lines extended way out in the street. And what an impressive crowd we people of Seattle are: young and old, in all manner of dress. I heard half a dozen languages there as we looked at this great record of life in America.

By coincidence the museum also displayed wonderful work by 5th and 6th graders in Libby Sinclair's classes. She teaches in Alternative Elementary School No. 2 in the old Decatur School, and she's a neighbor, just north of Denny Way. The students' aim was to learn about the 1920's and the 1930's by interviewing parents and grandparents. They wrote reports and read, listened to music and talked about the events and symbols of those times. They especially wanted to know how people faced hard times and adversity and to hear about details of family life, childhood, and work. Ms. Sinclair presented accounts of the great Harlem Renaissance in New York, when so many black writers, artists, musicians and poets flourished against obstacles, and then the country's disillusion during the Great Depression of the 1930's. The children then sewed large quilts illustrating the stories they had heard and the lives of the people they had interviewed. These history quilts were hung on the museum walls where you could touch them, alongside the reporting and letters the students had written. ▼▼



THE VALLEY VIEW
2802 East Madison St., Box 184
Seattle, WA 98112
Greater Madison Valley
Community Council
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Newsletter Staff

Jerry Sussman
Celine Grenier
Eli Stahlhut
Miriam Roskin

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Your submissions are appreciated! Mail to the address above.

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E-mail: madisonvalley@juno.com

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Next Community Council Meeting

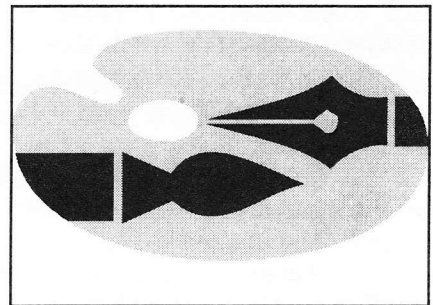
Tuesday, January 18, 1999, 7:30 p.m.

Martin Luther King School
in the portables

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Arts and Crafts Fair

Here's a call to all artists and craftspeople who would like to show and sell their work in the community this spring, with a percentage of profits going to Martin Luther King School.

If interested, please call Celine at 323-5801.