



A decision in 1892 by the School Board to build a one-room frame school on Boylston Avenue between Louisa and Roanoke, and its construction in 1895, may have determined the further decision by the City to buy some property at a Sheriff's Sale in 1896 - the south half of the playground across the street from the new school that was named Denny/Fuhrman. (This was the District name because it was platted by David T. Denny and Henry Fuhrman.) But nothing was done about the playground - for in four years the school enrollment had only risen to 70. But the Yukon gold rush and later plans for the AYP Expo spurred the growth of population in the District. The 1906 Annual Report notes that the playground site "is situated on the route which will be traveled a great deal in going to and from the Exposition grounds (and) is considered one of the important playground sites." In 1909 it was one of first four playgrounds to be "improved, equipped and supervised": a shelterhouse and wood frame swings, teeters, slide and cedar steps leading down from the 1905 addition to the school.

A central figure in the celebration of the 1909 Expo was the late W. H. Seward (1801-1872) who had been instrumental in the 1867 purchase of Alaska from Russia. To his further honor, the school was renamed in time for the Expo and the playground was also renamed - but in honor of John Rogers (Seward Park was not named until 1911). In a special session "for the purpose of naming unnamed tracts" the Park Board "after informal discussion" chose to honor the late (1901) former governor in naming this playground. (The John Rogers School was not named until the 1950s.)

JOHN RANKIN ROGERS was the third Governor of the State of Washington, serving from 1897-1901, member of the Populist (now Republican) Party; was elected to the State Legislature in 1894; he achieved fame as author of the "barefoot schoolboy law" that provided free textbooks in public schools (from an inscription on a statue in a park near the State Capital in Olympia). Rogers was born in Maine in 1838; "enjoyed good educational facilities", then went to Boston to learn the drug business. In 1856 he went to Mississippi to work as a druggist, then went to Illinois where he taught school, finally becoming a farmer. Returned to Maine as a druggist for 5 years; returned to farming in Kansas where he was elected to minor offices as a "Greenback" Republican, including County Commissioner. In 1887 he established a Populist newspaper in Kansas and was editor. In 1890 he came to Puyallup to engage in the real estate and merchandising business.

Steel & Searl

In this early period of playground development there was close cooperation between the Park Department, schools and YMCA, with playground supervision and leadership being drawn from those agencies. The Olmsted Bros. in a 1911 report stated their position that playgrounds and their management "can be more effectively handled by the School Commission." The foregoing may or may not explain the Board's decision to honor a significant contributor to the public school system.

In 1910 the wood frame play equipment was replaced with the new-concept steel "gym" apparatus: swings, rings, chinning bars, ladders, teeters, etc., handball, tennis courts and basketball, but not sufficient room for a ballfield. However, "patronage hardly came up to expectations." In 1914 Rogers PG was still included in the list of Class I - which now included 12 playgrounds. Following considerable discussion among Park Board members and with City Light, in 1924 Rogers PG was illuminated with electric lights, as an experiment in playfield lighting." It was felt that it was effective as far as policing was concerned, but a few more lights were needed to accommodate evening play.

(Meanwhile an event had occurred at the foot of Roanoke Street on Lake Union: in 1915 William E. Boeing built a small seaplane hangar and rebuilt a plane, assisted by Herb Hunger. They spawned the huge Boeing Co. + United Airlines.) Sea. Hist. Soc.

Seward School added another building - a brick one built in 1917. Typically the (Franklin) street was barricaded school hours - a daily process that became tiresome - but the City Engineer rejected closure of the street in 1946 - "a probable future approach to a projected high level bridge (over the canal)."

History: ROGERS PG  
7/8/74

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In 1951 the old "experimental" lights were replaced as was the old frame shelter-house in 1965, but relocated to make room for a Little League ballfield. The skeleton of the worn out steel apparatus had long ago been replaced with "safer" (lower) equipment.