



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

700 Third Avenue · 4th floor · Seattle, Washington 98104 · (206) 684-0228

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 304/01

Name and Address of Property: **Kinnear Park**
988 W. Olympic Place

Legal Description:

Kinnear's Addition, Blocks 25, Lots 8-18; Block 26, all lots; Block 29 east half

At the public meeting held on August 29, 2001, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Kinnear Park as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

- (B) *It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the community, city, state or nation.*
- (C.) *It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state or nation.*
- (D.) *It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction.*
- (E.) *It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder*
- (F.) *Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or city.*

DESCRIPTION

The description of Kinnear Park found in the *Park Commissioners Report* for 1904 remains largely accurate today:

It is bounded on the north by Prospect Street, on the east by Olympic Place, on the west by a tier of half-lots fronting on Elliott Avenue and on the south by Beach Drive (*now West Mercer Place*). Kinnear Park occupies a high bluff overlooking the Sound, and is especially scenic, as the view therefrom includes the water frontage of Elliott Bay,

Puget Sound and the Olympic mountains to the northwest. It has been improved with symmetrical paths, green lawns, clusters of trees, shrubs and beds of flowers, so artistically arranged as to give a most pleasing impression. The native madrona trees add much to the beauty of the park.

The original design intent of the park appears to be largely unchanged. It was built as a largely passive place to stroll among lawns and plantings and enjoy the view. The circulation network of pathways and the arrangement of lawns and planting beds are much the same as they were in 1931, the date of the oldest existing plan. This is probably substantially the same as the 1892 design, since there is no record of significant changes. A retaining wall and steps were built in 1909, when Olympic Place was widened. The rustic shelters and simple service buildings that once existed have been replaced by a single Art Deco-style comfort station.

Plant materials have been simplified considerably from the original selections. In recent years, work has concentrated on maintenance, slide repair and slope stabilization. Within the past two years, several beds, primarily near the main entrance, have been renovated by removing overgrown plantings and replacing them with new plant materials. Over the years, the more tender plants had died, leaving only the most vigorous and making a rather unimaginative landscape. In addition, recent Parks Department and community efforts have led to plantings of native plants on the bluff and in Lower Kinnear Park.

Vicinity

Olympic Way West is lined with large apartment buildings and condominiums. This area saw considerable early apartment development, because of its spectacular views and easy streetcar access. Similar buildings are found on West Roy Street, adjoining the park's lower entrance. Small commercial buildings abut the undeveloped portion of the park along Elliott Avenue West. Some notable nearby buildings include the Chelsea (1907), the Kinnear ((1909), the Seaview (1930), Skyline House (1956) and a Mediterranean-style Anhalt building (1930).

Kinnear Park has three distinct sections: Upper Kinnear Park, Lower Kinnear Park, and the steep bluff that connects the two areas.

Upper Kinnear Park

Present Appearance: Upper Kinnear Park is about three acres, long and narrow in shape, running northwest-southeast atop the bluff at the southwest edge of Queen Anne hill. The park is on the south side of West Olympic Place, with an ivy-covered concrete retaining wall as the boundary. The main entrance is about halfway along the park on Olympic Place west of 7th Avenue West. Other entrances are at 6th Avenue West, 7th Avenue West and at the west end, at 9th Avenue West and West Prospect.

The park's overall plan is asymmetrical, with a large lawn in the center and smaller ones at each end, separated by curving pathways and planting beds. The pathways are of compacted earth, edged by clay tile gutters (probably installed by the W.P.A. in 1941). Clusters of trees and numerous planting beds are scattered throughout. The bluff edge has a black chain link fence for safety and numerous shrubs, vines and large trees, including madronas. Other notable trees in the park include large beeches, oaks, cedars, maples, elms, chestnuts and firs. Each bed has layers of plantings, with trees, shrubs and perennials; some are underplanted with annuals and bulbs. Many of the plant materials

are typical of what was found in the original plant lists. Among the most common shrubs are rhododendron, viburnum, laurel, spirea, mock orange, hydrangea, camellia, privet, barberry, cotoneaster and wild rose.

At the main entrance, stairs (constructed in 1909) descend to the formally landscaped center of the park, around the elegant comfort station. The stairs are flanked by recently-renovated beds featuring a large fir tree, a striking euphorbia, large rosemary and lavender and new plantings of pygmy barberry. The entry stairs are on an axis with the viewing platform on the roof of the comfort station. The stairs to the platform are flanked by two cedars, a trimmed laurel hedge and benches. Two more staircases, one on each side, descend to the lower level of the park. The beds on the slope end in short retaining walls of stone-like concrete with thick mortar; the one on the east appears older, while the western one is more recent.

The 1929 comfort station is of concrete and glazed red brick with accent bricks of dark gray. The flat-roofed building is irregular in shape, set into the hillside, with a two-story center section (used for storage) and two one-story wings (restrooms). The roof, with a floor of 6x6 red pavers, serves as a viewpoint over Elliott Bay and the Olympics. The picnic table there is one of the most heavily used amenities in the park. A strong Art Deco influence is apparent in the abstract floral pattern of the cast concrete cornice and door lintels and in the corbeled brick doorways. The doors are of wood planks. The metal-framed multipane windows have decorative metal grills, matching the railing around the roof deck and seating area in front; these date to the 1990s renovation, which retained the building's original character.

Another major feature is just west of the comfort station, below the viewing platform. A formal seating area under a fifty-year-old bay tree, with two benches, a drinking fountain, a planting of nandina and a memorial plaque commemorating the park's 1989 centennial with a photo of the historical view from this spot (taken long before the construction of the grain terminal). New metal fencing surrounds the viewpoint. Below is a large bed of shrubs and groundcovers, notably viburnum, pieris and cotoneaster. To the east is a large triangular bed with hydrangea, daffodils, camellias, saxatile, rhododendrons and foxglove. All of these are typical of the original plantings.

At the upper level, just west of the main entry stairs, is a children's swing set, the remaining piece of what was once a larger play area. A grassy bank goes up to the ivy-covered concrete wall along West Olympic Place. The large north lawn slopes down, with views to Piers 90-91 and Magnolia. At the end, a sloping path goes up to the northwest entry. Nearby, lupine and willow have been planted in recent years to help stabilize the slope. The bank along the street side in this area has recently been renovated with a board railing and low retaining walls of timber and concrete blocks. A section of the long bank is covered with ivy, while another section has a large rockery with sedum, foxglove, mugho pine, hens & chickens, lupine and other perennials. Large rhododendrons, cedars, elm, madrona, pine and birch grow in the lawn and along the pathways.

To the east of the comfort station, another lawn and several large planting beds, including a large bed of wild rose. Near the east entry is a woodland garden with stone steps, an early concrete-and-stone wall and plants such as ferns, violets and daffodils. Cedars and a large chestnut shade the garden. There is also a planting of yucca, which is evident in early photos. Other shrubs and trees in this half of the park are similar to those toward the west.

Original Appearance: When Upper Kinnear Park was originally laid out in 1892-94, the paths were graded and graveled and lawns planted much as they are now . The original plantings seem to have been more diverse than those seen today. The 1893 Annual Report contains a detailed inventory of the plant materials at the park, including 35 species of trees (with large numbers of hawthorn, locust and linden) and a wide range of shrubs, perennials, annuals, vines, perennials and bulbs.

In 1893-94, a rustic parachute (or mushroom)-shaped seat and a trellis pavilion were built. The trellis pavilion is believed to have been located where the viewing platform is today, with the mushroom seat below, where the seating area is now. These structures deteriorated severely, and were demolished by 1929, when the present comfort station was built. In the 1890s numerous benches of elaborate rustic designs were installed; they were replaced by simpler wood slat benches, and the benches there today resemble these. A simple wooden service building at the north end, built in 1947, has also been demolished. The existing swing set is a simplified version of the original children's playground, which included a slide, teeter-totter and a sand box. Probably the most important change in the park's design occurred in 1909, when West Olympic Place was widened and regraded. Until that time the park had been on the same grade as the street, separated by a simple wooden railing. The regrading required construction of the retaining wall and stairways with significant new plantings.

Lower Kinnear Park

Present Appearance: Lower Kinnear Park, about five acres, lies near the bottom of the bluff, and is accessible from the end of West Roy Street . The rear yards of several houses lie along the south edge of the park near this entrance. The area can also be reached by a steep switchback path from the east end of Upper Kinnear Park. New wooden steps are set into the hillside at the western edge near Elliott Avenue and West Mercer Place. The two flat cleared areas were formerly used as picnic and play areas; they have an excellent water view . A fenced asphalt tennis court is now the only amenity in this part of the park ; the play equipment, picnic tables and restrooms that were once here have deteriorated over the years and been removed . Plantings are more informal than in Upper Kinnear. One bed has recently been planted with native plant materials, including sword ferns, snowberry, cedar and salal. This is part of a city-wide effort by community members and the Parks Department to restore the native vegetation that was cleared out when the parks were first developed.

Original Appearance: This section of the park was not cleared initially, but was improved a few years later and became very popular. The 1909 annual report describes it in these words:

The lower portion of the park, under the bluff, is reached by winding paths and has been arranged for and especially adapted for picnic grounds and a playground for small children, being supplied with swings, teeters, sand courts, etc. Kinnear Park, being located in the midst of apartment houses and homes, makes it an ideal community park and recreation center and it being a vantage point for a close marine view makes it an attractive point for people from all over the city hence, considering its size, it is undoubtedly the most attractive park in the city.

At the neighborhood's request, a horseshoe court (no longer there) was added in 1944. The tennis court was built in 1947. Two years later two simple wooden comfort stations and a maintenance building were added, but these are now gone.

Bluff

Present Appearance: The steep bluff retains a natural appearance, and is heavily covered with vegetation, both trees and vines, including alder, madrona, maple, English holly, laurel, English ivy and blackberry. A switchback path descends from the east end of Upper Kinnear to the tennis court below. The trail has a new wood railing; the timber posts from the old railing remain outside the new one. The TREEmendous Seattle program planted evergreen trees on the slope after the 1995 slides.

Historic Appearance: The bluff itself is not well documented in photos, except in those of the upper park, which show a variety of trees, particularly straggly firs. Written descriptions specifically mention native firs and madronas, but focus on the views rather than the bluff's plant materials. The bluff probably looks generally the same as it always did, except that the mix of trees and vines may have changed over the years. Slides have always been a major problem in this location, due to the combination of sandy soil, steep slopes, underground springs and water lapping at the base of the bluff. Elliott Bay originally reached up to the edge of the bluff. Elliott Avenue was a plank road on a trestle, turning east on West Mercer Place (then called Beach Drive); the railroad ran on a trestle to the west of it. Filling of the shoreline in about 1920 helped to some extent, but problems continue today, and there have been several slides in recent years. Slide restoration and mitigation are a constant effort.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Kinnear Park was the third major park property that the City of Seattle acquired, but it was the first to be cleared and planted, largely due to community efforts. The property was donated by George Kinnear and his wife Angie Simmons Kinnear in two sections: 11 acres on October 24, 1887, followed by three more acres on December 30, 1897.

The Donor

George Kinnear first came to Seattle from Illinois in 1874. He was so impressed with the prospects he saw in Seattle that he sold his Illinois holdings and, in 1878, bought extensive property on Queen Anne and elsewhere in Seattle. He subdivided Kinnear's Addition in 1884, filing several other plats in later years. In addition to Kinnear Park, in 1904 the couple donated Franklin Playground on Lower Queen Anne to the city. The Queen Anne-style mansion that he and his wife built at the foot of the Counterbalance was a noted Seattle landmark until its demolition in 1959. Kinnear was an officer of the Washington Improvement Company and the Rainier Power and Railway Company. He was also a very active citizen, serving as captain of the Home Guard and training members to keep order during the Anti-Chinese Riots of 1886. Mr. Kinnear died in 1912.

The Landscape Architect

The primary designer of Kinnear Park was Edward O. Schwagerl, who was parks superintendent for Seattle and one of the Northwest's most prominent early landscape architects. He was born in

Bavaria in 1842 and raised in Paris; his family moved to the United States when he was twelve. Schwagerl returned to Europe in 1865 to work for a French landscape architect, but soon returned to the U.S. to work for a Connecticut landscape architect. He later practiced in Omaha, St. Louis and Cleveland. At this time he would have undoubtedly become familiar with the park and boulevard designs being done by Frederick Law Olmsted and his firm in the Midwest. In 1890, he moved farther west, to head the parks department in Tacoma. Although he was there only briefly, he designed two major parks, Wright Park and Point Defiance Park, and began work on a comprehensive parks and boulevard system.

In 1892, Schwagerl accepted the position of Superintendent of Public Parks for Seattle. While in that position he laid out both Kinnear Park (which was already being graded and planted) and the first Denny Park (destroyed by regrading in the 1930s). He sought out exotic plants, using them with natives and even tropicals in the early parks, and established a plant nursery at what is now Volunteer Park. He also began planning of a comprehensive parks and boulevard system. In 1895, he returned to private practice, first in Tacoma, then in Seattle. He became well known for his residential work and subdivision design, including the University Heights Addition.

Schwagerl's comprehensive parks and boulevard plan called for preserving the city's shorelines and major vista points (Seward Park, Sand Point, Fort Lawton and Alki) as parks, connected by boulevards. However, the city, reeling from the Panic of 1893, was not ready to invest in such a scheme. In 1903, however, the city, buoyed by the Klondike Gold Rush, and seeking to make a name for itself on the world map, hired the prestigious Olmsted firm to complete the plan—which turned out to be much like that proposed by Schwagerl. In 1906 Schwagerl was selected by the Hunter Tract Improvement Company to plan Mount Baker Park. Schwagerl's design integrated the 100-acre subdivision's boulevards and extensive park grounds into the official Olmsted Plan. Schwagerl died shortly after completion of this project, in 1910.

The Olmsted Brothers

According to *Shaping Seattle Architecture*, Kinnear Park was the Seattle park most highly praised by the Olmsted Plan and was the least changed when the report was implemented.

When the Olmsted Brothers firm was selected to prepare a comprehensive parks and boulevards plan in 1903, they began their work by visiting each existing park. On May 4, 1903, John Charles Olmsted and Percy Jones visited Kinnear Park, making the following observations in their field notes:

This park is the most highly finished of any work we have seen, and yet it has many beautiful and natural effects, among others some fine firs, and a very good row of madrona trees. The grading is good, and, as a whole, the park is very pleasing. Here, too, however, a better effect would have been attained if more care had been taken in grouping the shrubs. Being on the southwest slope, it is much more advanced than the other parks, as it is sheltered from the cold winds.

In his daily letter to his wife, Sophie, John Charles was somewhat more frank:

It is a beautiful little park with plenty of natural trees and shrubs growing on it. I should have said that we first visited Denny Park, a good-sized square on a smaller hill nearer the business center. Both have been laid out and planted by a local landscape gardener, Swagel, or Swangel, but his walks are very crooked often and his banks steep and high and his planting very mixed but pretty much the same selection for every place...so he seems to be no very considerable artist in his line.

The 1903 *Olmsted Report* had these words about the park:

While this park is equal to three or four blocks in area, much of it is so steep as to be unavailable, except to look over....Most of the native forest which covered it is gone, but a few tall fir trees remain, and a considerable number of native deciduous and broad-leaved evergreen trees and shrubs survive. The moderately sloping area above the bluff which is not occupied by native trees has been turned into lawns, with winding paths, and trees and shrubs of a more or less exotic character have been added. The park is pleasing in detail and extremely valuable, owing to the fine views which it commands over the Sound. It is a good sample of the miles of similar bluff parks which it is hoped the city will eventually have....

The shrubbery which has been added in the park is perhaps open to the criticism that it is too miscellaneous, and that it repeats practically the same assortment used in Denny Park, and in many of the principal private grounds of the city. As before stated, each park should have an individuality of its own, and this idea should be acted on in the planting as well as constructive features. In seeking for some local conditions that will indicate an idea to be followed in the selection of plants, it seems that the fact that it is well sheltered from the north by the hill, and the fact that the ground is at the time well drained, indicate that it would be a particularly appropriate idea to make a planting feature of the early-flowering shrubs and perennial herbaceous plants, omitting all tender bedding plants and all plants appropriately associated with low, moist ground.

There is no evidence that this rather general advice was followed, as the city turned its efforts toward acquiring and developing the new parks and boulevards identified in the *Olmsted Plan*. Although the diversity of plants decreased, and the use of tender bedding plants declined, it was more likely for maintenance reasons than in keeping with a particular plan.

Early Park Development

Kinnear Park is a significant example of park development typical of the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries, and is one of Seattle's best and most intact examples of this type of park. It provided a pleasant place to enjoy the view, to appreciate nature in the form of exotic and native plantings, and to socialize with neighbors both informally and at more formal events.

The property was probably clearcut before its purchase by Mr. Kinnear; straggly remaining trees are featured in most of the early photos. According to an 1888 photo (Fig. B-29), at least some of the property appears to have been improved and planted by the Kinnears before it was donated as a

public park. This photo shows pathways, lawn and shrubs, and a level entrance with a wood railing and turnstiles.

More extensive improvements began soon after the property was donated to the Parks Department. The department's monthly and annual reports of 1891-94 provide detailed information on the work of clearing the land, grading and graveling the walkways, and planting lawns, shrubs, trees and annuals and perennials of every description. Since this was the only park being developed by the city at the time, considerable effort went into it during these years. Plantings originally included a wide range of exotics of the type that might be found in a private garden, and little use of native plants. Considerable planting had been done by the time that Schwagerl arrived in May 1892, but a number of beds and borders were replanted after his arrival. For example, the 1893 Annual Report contains a detailed inventory of the plant materials at the park, including: 128 trees (35 species, with large numbers of hawthorn, locust and linden); 948 shrubs (a formal rose garden, along with many spirea, cotoneaster, camellia, pyracantha, rhododendrons, lilacs, privet, mock orange, currant and elderberry); 11,912 perennials (primarily English daisy, pansies, sedum and chrysanthemum); 1,009 vines (mostly vinca major and English ivy); 1,899 tender perennials (amaranth, coleus); 6,815 annuals (mostly lobelia, geranium, portulaca, phlox, nicotiana and verbena); and, 584 bulbs (mostly cannas, knophia and caladium).

The 1894 report mentioned that nearly 17,000 annuals had been put out; it also recommends that there be a greater reliance in future years on the perennials being grown in the nursery at the Volunteer Park site. "There are still many undesirable native shrubs...(it is) contemplated to replace by additional choice and ornamental shrubs and trees as soon as they attain proper size and condition in the nursery....most native shrubs have been replanted to thicken the boundary belt and to make room for new stock." Several large trees standing alone were proposed for removal for safety reasons.

By 1895, the park was virtually completed, and later mentions in the department's annual reports are primarily descriptive, speaking of maintenance rather than additional plantings or improvements. This was also the year that Schwagerl returned to private practice, so that the experimentation with new plant materials probably declined.

Mentions have been found of Kinnear Park as being the city's "Park of State," featuring a trees from each state in the union. A 1959 letter donating a hemlock in honor of the new state of Alaska implies that the other states were already represented. However, no specific documentation of this has been identified.

Structures and Amenities

Kinnear Park was long noted for the variety and design of its unique rustic structures, featured in many photos and on postcards. In a 1964 newspaper interview, Elsa Churchill Griffith, who grew up next to the park from its beginning, said "There were lookouts, little summer houses, a little Hansel and Gretel house in the shape of a mushroom. The big trees were left, but the undergrowth, weeds and trash were cleared out and beautiful flower beds were planted, with winding paths to the beach below." She said that the planting became a community project, with neighbors bringing plants.

According to Parks records for 1892, 53 "rustic seats of dissimilar design," a ladies cottage and the famous "mushroom seat" (Fig. B-27) were built. A 400 square-foot concrete-bottomed lily pond with a footbridge was also constructed however, its location is not known and it must have been filled in before the existing map was drawn in 1931. Soon after, in 1894, the rustic pavilion (Fig. B-26) was built, with a trellis roof and a root cellar, work room and storage below; it was accessed by a rustic bridge from the adjacent bank. Swings, teeter-totters and sand courts were also added (Fig. B-28). Improvements were also made to the small triangle to the east on West Olympic Place; this space has been cared for by the Parks Department, although owned by Engineering Department (now Seatran).

In 1909, the concrete retaining wall was built along West Olympic Place, probably the most significant change in the park's design. It was necessitated by the widening and regrading of West Olympic Place, which made the park, in some locations, as much as seven feet higher than the new street level. James Frederick Dawson, of the Olmsted firm, was consulted about how the resulting bank should be treated. In a letter of March 27, 1909, he recommended that, rather than regrading the park property, a retaining wall should be built to address the difference in grade. He recommended that the ground be sloped and covered with vines such as blackberries or roses, to preserve the park's privacy. He recommended an entrance opposite Epler Place (now 7th Avenue West) and no entrance at Park Place (now 6th Avenue West), which would require steps. He also recommended that the entrances at West Prospect and opposite 662 Olympic Place (the current main entrance) be retained.

Dawson's most specific recommendation, and the only design that the Olmsted firm did for this park, was for a seat to be built into the wall at the west end, so that people could enjoy the view while waiting for the trolley. The seat is there today (Fig. B-43), where Olympic turns to 8th Avenue West (although the trolley bus no longer stops there and the view is blocked). Most of Dawson's recommendations were followed, although the wall is of concrete rather than the recommended stone (Fig. B-44).

In 1929, the picturesque rustic pavilion built in 1894 was removed, replaced by the current masonry comfort station farther up the slope. This design was one of six masonry comfort stations in several parks built in the late 1920s-early 1930s using various revival styles, including Tudor, Mission Revival, Art Deco, English Cottage and Colonial Revival. They were designed by in-house staff, perhaps by Donald McDonald, the senior architectural draftsman. The contractor was H.C. Bromley.

In 1930, the Parks Department laid off more than 100 employees, due to lack of funds. However, records show that in 1931 the unemployed started working at the park, probably on general maintenance and cleanup. At about this time, a neighbor, O.W. Brown, who owned a large equipment company, built a partial cement walkway from the end of West Roy Street (near the existing tennis court), and offered to donate enough cement to extend it, since the wooden walkway had rotted. It is not known whether this was done, although there is a concrete path there now. In 1940, the Works Progress Administration added drainage tile and catch basins in Upper Kinnear.

Additional improvements were made in the years following World War II. A fenced tennis court and a comfort station were added in the lower part of the park, near the end of West Roy Street; these restrooms have since been demolished. At the west end of Upper Kinnear, a 25x41 wood frame maintenance building with a pitched roof and concrete foundation was built in 1947, with a

