

# The Ultimate, Unsurpassable, Top-of-the-Line Study in Perfection in Presenting the History of W. F. West High School

Volume I

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subliminal vibration

*by those hard-working yet still very humble students*

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(It just doesn't get any better than this)

# History of W.F. West High School

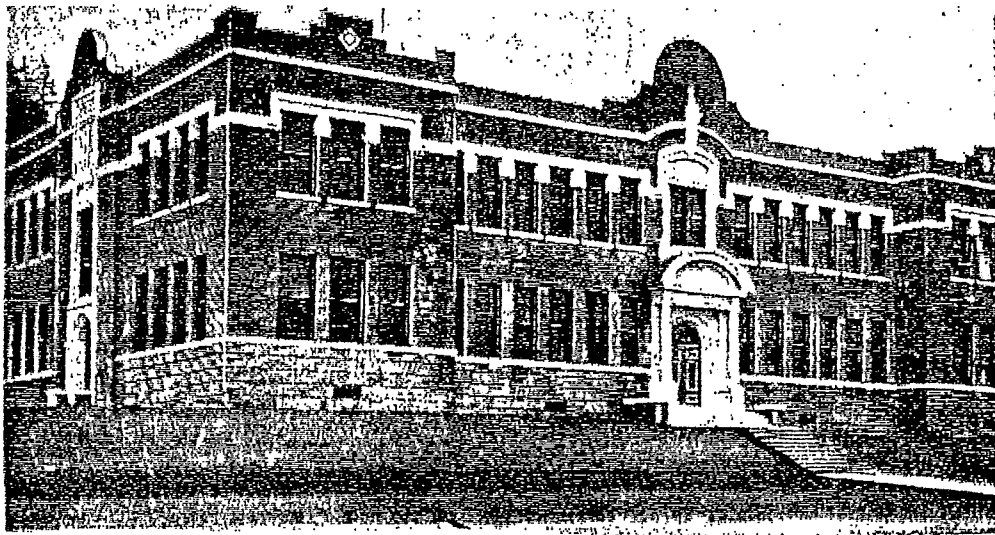
The history of W.F. West High School has, until now, never been compiled, and we hope that future students of W.F. West will add and refine this brief historical account.

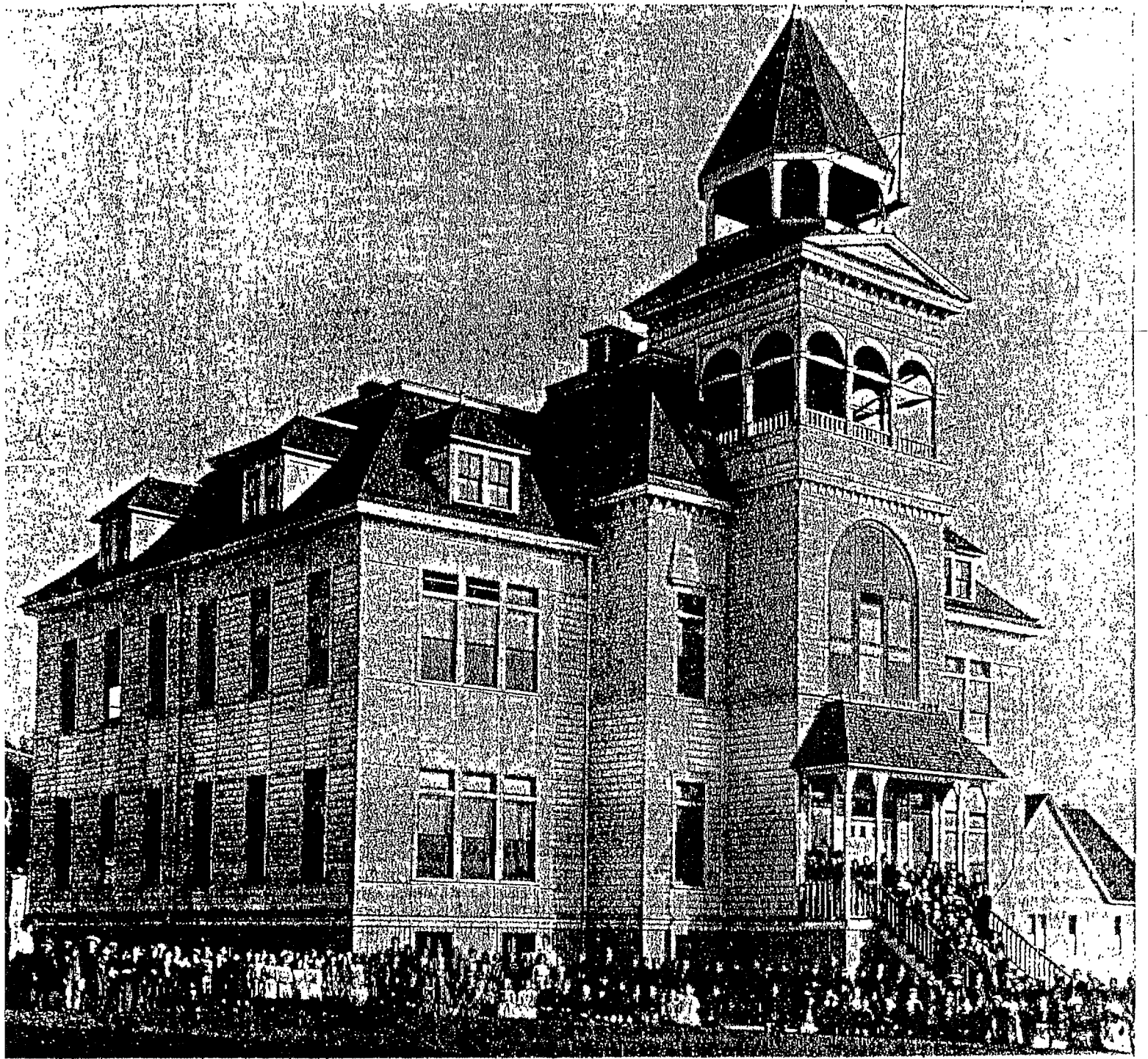
The first school in Chehalis (formerly Saundersville) that we have record of was a deserted log cabin near the Newaukum River in the early 1860's. This school was held three months a year. At this time, the school was completely supported by public subscriptions because there was little money raised in taxes. In 1872 the small cabin was abandoned and replaced by a better one that Judge O.B. McFadden built on his land.

By 1874 the town's first courthouse was built. Classes were moved to a large courtroom on the second floor, but increase in county business forced the school to move again two years later. This time the school board decided to raise taxes and construct a schoolhouse. In 1876 the first school house was built at a cost of \$600 on the southwest corner of State and Center Streets. A second room was added in 1884 at a cost of \$550.

In 1888 school patrons approved a \$5,500, seven year bond issue at 10% interest to build a new school. They then purchased an acre in an open field in what was then the northwest part of the town. Construction started in 1889. In order to complete the school a second bond issue for \$3,000 was needed. This school was called the East Side School or "The High School".

In 1909, a new High school was built at Market and North Streets where Les Schwab is now. The Old High School was moved to the present location of Cascade School.





ALL CHEHALIS WENT TO THIS SCHOOL IN 1889

— Photo Provided by Nathan Howell, Pe Ell

In 1949, a disastrous earthquake hit Chehalis. The High School was severely damaged and condemned. William F. West, a local resident and former owner of the St. Helens Hotel, stepped in to help the "school-less" students out.

William Francis West was locally known as the "Little Brother of Chehalis", although his six-foot-two, two-hundred twenty pound frame could hardly be called "little". Born on Sept. 30, 1875, he was the youngest child of William "Big Bill" West, the locally famous pioneer and first mayor of Chehalis. Because of a lack in educational facilities, William West, his one sister, and his four brothers, were all taught by a teacher brought up from Portland. His brother John later became mayor of Chehalis and had the longest term of any mayor in Chehalis' history.

In 1904, William West borrowed money from his uncle, John Dobson, and bought the St. Helens Hotel on February 28, 1904. He owned and operated this building until 1948. Modern for its time, the St. Helens Hotel was well known and respected up and down the west coast.

His ownership of the St. Helens Hotel was by no means the extent of his community involvement. Locally, he was known as an optimist, and was extremely involved in the community. Having no children of their own, William and Blanch West "adopted" the area's children. Realizing the need for better school facilities, he donated 18 acres in the then undeveloped Snively area to be used for a new high school campus in 1947. Unfortunately, only two years following the construction of this high school, an earthquake hit the Chehalis area and the High School, along with the West Side School, was condemned.

The land given by Mr. and Mrs. West was quickly prepared for the construction of a new high school. Construction of the new Chehalis High School took place around 1950, and was completed very quickly.

In 1951, further additions to the school added a vocational building and extra rooms on the north and south wings of the main building, brought the total price of the school to over one million dollars. Of that one million dollar price tag, twenty-five thousand dollars of it was paid by Mr. and Mrs. West.

In 1953, an athletic field and grandstands was built and named the W.F. West Athletic Field in Mr. West's honor. Total price tag for the field and grandstands was almost a quarter million dollars, and the Wests graciously donated almost fourteen thousand dollars to pay for this project as well.

In 1954, a gymnasium and music center were added, costing nearly half a million dollars, and in 1955, the Wests purchased and donated blacktop for a parking lot.

In 1956, the Wests and Chester V. Rhodes, former Chehalis School District Superintendent, set up the W.F. West Scholarship Fund in their will, insuring that their money would always be used for their "adopted" Chehalis High School students.

Mr. and Mrs. West gave so much to the school and its students that in 1957, Chehalis High School was renamed to W.F. West High School, in honor of the contributions the Wests made to the school. The Wests were opposed to the idea of having the school named after them, but allowed the school to bestow the honor upon them.

The Wests continued to give to the school, donating forty thousand dollars to various school projects over the next few years.

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On September 20, 1963, William Francis West, the father of W.F. West High School, passed away. His wife, Blanch E. West, later died in 1969. Mr. West's funeral was held in his favorite place, W.F. West High School.

W.F. West continued to grow and add new programs to its academic and athletic rosters over the years. 1978 saw a number of changes for W.F. West High School. In that year, an Honors Program was begun for the '78-'79 school year, offering students more challenging courses and providing better college preparedness. Later, a one hundred thousand dollar, all-weather track was installed to replace the old one at the W.F. West Athletic Field, and a hot lunch program was re-instituted, charging a mere seventy cents per lunch. Also, the state legislature passed the Basic Education Act, which set how many hours students were required to attend school and the number of hours teachers were required to teach each day. Finally, a Drama Club was proposed to be formed at the high school for those interested in theater and other dramatic performances. This club later came to be known as West Theatre.

In 1980, more modifications were made to the school building. The high school office saw the addition of a conference room, an ASB Financial Office, and a merger with the Athletic Office. Also, the Instructional Media Center (IMC) added a new counseling center.

In 1982, A new attendance policy was put into effect, a new two-hour, three-period, testing schedule was instituted, and girl's softball was begun. The major event of the year was the renovation of the W.F. West Athletic Field, which removed the old topsoil from the field and replaced it with sand. In addition, the grandstands were cleaned, repaired, and repainted. This process took about four to six weeks to complete, sending the home football games to Tiger Stadium in Centralia until its completion. The whole project was paid for by individual and group donations from the community totaling more than eighty thousand dollars. Finally, W.F. West had a new principal, Rainier Houser, who replaced former principal George Murdock after he left for a new position in Walla Walla. Houser remained as principal until 1988.

In 1985, new state guidelines led to change the grade point scale at W.F. West from 5.0 to 4.0. This change didn't seem to hurt the school academically, though, as West was rated that same year among the top forty schools in Washington State. Later that year, W.F. West athletics reached a new level with admission (along with rival Centralia) into the Black Hills League. Also, a soccer program was started, and the school cafeteria began serving breakfast in the morning. Unfortunately, W.F. West also saw a longtime, nationally recognized science teacher pass away, Mr. James Walter. Not only was Mr. Walter an excellent science teacher, but was active in the national science education community, even co-authoring the textbook for the Introduction to Physical Science class.

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1986 saw the introduction of a girl's soccer program, and the passing of a school levy to pay for maintenance and operations costs.

In 1988, Chehalis School District Superintendent Donald A. Mitchell retired from his post, and was replaced by Gene Sharratt. Sharratt served as superintendent until 1991. Also, Dr. Linda K. Smith was named the new principal at W.F. West High School, and serves today as the current principal.

In 1990, W.F. West received a fourteen thousand dollar grant for programs designed for students with learning disabilities. The grant provided a computer network, software, and training for teachers. Later that year, Ron Franklin became a new assistant principal, working alongside our other new assistant principal, Dan Steward. The Honor Roll Gold Card program was started, and a new special education and seventy-eight passenger bus was purchased by the school district. Also, the \$5.7 million dollar bond for renovation of the school was voted on and passed, garnering sixty-eight percent of the vote for approval.

1991 saw the moving of Superintendent Gene Sharratt, the hiring of Dr. Mike Boring as the new Superintendent, and the beginning of W.F. West renovation with the groundbreaking starting in October of '91. Also, Tom Smith, former teacher and head coach of the W.F. West Basketball Team in the early 60's, was inducted into the Washington Interscholastic Basketball Coaches Hall of Fame. Smith led the Bearcat Basketball team to a State Championship in 1960.

Today, W.F. West is one of the most modern facilities on the west coast, with an extensive infrastructure built to handle computer networking, video pipelining, room-to-room and room-to-office intercommunications, and a wiring spine for further expansion possibilities. W.F. West is truly a school with a great history, steeped in a tradition of excellence in academic, athletic, and artistic pursuits. We know that the history to be written in the future for W.F. West High School will continue in that tradition.



## **W.F. West Historical Timeline**

- 1949 - Chehalis High School and West Side School condemned following earthquake in 1949. School stood for two years after condemnation
- 1950 - Construction of new Chehalis High School begins
  - Wests and Chester V. Rhodes (former Chehalis school superintendent) discuss plans for a scholarship fund
- 1951 - Parts of north and south wing added, voc. building completed  
(Total building price - \$1,100,546; WFW Contribution - \$25,831)
- 1953 - Athletic Fields and Grandstands built and named W.F. West Athletic Field  
(Total price - \$224,037; WFW Contribution - \$13,742)
- 1954 - Gym and Music Room completed - \$498,100
- 1955 - Parking lot blacktop donated by Mr. and Mrs. West
- 1956 - W.F. West scholarship set up in a will after arrangements with William Luebke
- 1957 - Chehalis High School changed to W.F. West High School in honor of William Frances West
  - \$40,000 donated by the Wests to various school projects
- 5/78 - Honors Program begins school year '78-'79. Program gives higher ratings for more difficult schedules. One study hour per quarter offered to Honor students
- 10/78 - W.F. West to receive \$100,000 all-weather track to replace old one. Hot lunches re-instituted at WFW at cost of \$0.70
- 11/78 - School goes to six-period schedule. Caused by Basic Education Act passed by legislature; which sets number of hours students must attend school and number of hours instructors must teach each day. Student reaction was mixed
- 12/78 - New Drama club proposed
- 5/80 - Office and IMC modifications - Counseling Center in IMC, construction of conference rooms, move of athletic office, development of ASB financial official
- 1/82 - New Attendance Policy in effect Jan. 14
- 7/82 - Football Field Renovation (\$80,000 through individual and group donations, topsoil removed, replaced with sand, took 4-6 weeks)
- 7/82 - Rainier Houser replaces George Murdock as principal
- 11/82 - BHL refuses to admit Chehalis and Centralia (remain in St. Helens League)
- 6/88 - Donald A. Mitchell, superintendent of Chehalis School District, retires
- 7/88 - Gene Sharratt replaces Don Mitchell as Chehalis School District Superintendent
- 4/90 - W.F. West received \$14,000 in grant money for students w/ learning disabilities (computer network, training for teachers, software)
- 7/90 - Ron Franklin becomes assistant principal
- 7/90 - Special Education bus and 78 passenger bus received through board approval
- 9/90 - \$5.7 million bond passes for renovation (68%)
- 9/90 - Gold Card Program started
- 6/91 - Superintendent Gene Sharratt leaves after 19 years of education
- 7/91 - Tom Smith inducted into Washington Interscholastic Basketball Coaches Hall of Fame (Teacher and coach at W.F. West for 29 years, took team to state in 1960)
- 7/91 - Mike Boring, new Superintendent of Chehalis Schools
- 10/91 - Ground breaking ceremony for renovation

## **Biographical Sketch: William Frances West**

Born Sept. 30, 1875

- youngest child
- 4 brothers, 1 sister
- brother John becomes mayor (20's) 1923-1936

Taught locally by teacher from Portland

Was known as "Little Brother of Chehalis"

6' 2", 220 lbs.

Father known as "Big Bill"

- locally famous pioneer, settled in Saundersville on Sept. 22, 1864
- first mayor

Borrowed money from uncle, John Dobson, and bought St. Helen's Hotel Feb. 28, 1904

- owned and operated until 1948
- "modern", well known and respected on west coast

Optimist, active in community

Donated 18 acres in the then undeveloped Snively area for a new high school campus in 1947

Died September 20, 1963

Wife Blanch West died in 1969

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### Various and assorted *Crimson & Gray* Articles (1978-present)

- 3/78 New school board member: John C. Freitag
- 5/78 Honor program begins
- 8/78 Track under construction
- 8/78 New lunch program at WFW
- 11/78 New 6-period schedule
- 12/78 New drama club started
- 3/78 Batting cage replaced
- 8/79 West Theatre formed
- 1/80 New facilities at Greenhill
- 5/80 Architectural modifications to office, library
- 1/82 New attendance policy
- 4/82 Girls' Softball begins
- 8/82 2-hour testing schedule instituted
- 2/85 5.0 to 4.0 to meet state guidelines
- 3/85 West rated in top 40 schools in Washington
- 3/85 Soccer comes to W.F. West
- 8/85 West gains sister school
- 8/85 West joins BHL
- 8/85 Mr. James Walter, longtime science teacher, passes away
- 12/85 Cafeteria begins serving breakfast
- 2/86 Levy passed (Maintenance and operations)
- 3/86 Girls' soccer begins