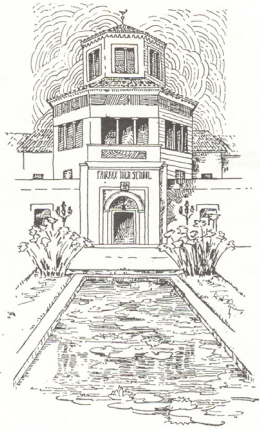


Eighty Years of Fairfax High School

by Paul J. Hamel



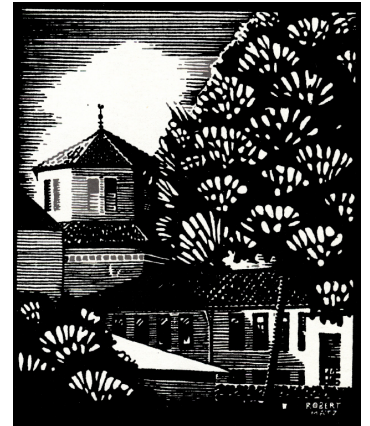
A drawing from the 1939 Fairfax yearbook

Over the last 80 years, Fairfax High has changed from a small local school serving a few hundred students to a huge institution serving about 2,200 students, many of whom are bussed in from other areas.

The doors of Fairfax High School opened in 1924. When the School Board bought the 28-acre swampy area or "cienaga," which was covered with bean fields, it was necessary to truck in thirty-eight thousand loads of dirt to raise the frontage along Melrose to support the building of a school. It would take another three years to complete the campus with the addition of the auditorium, Fine Arts Building, gymnasium, sunken gardens

and fountain. Originally, Fairfax High was intended to be an agricultural and mechanical school. The curriculum included landscape gardening, forestry, architecture, and agronomy.

In 1966 the original structures were declared unsafe during an earthquake and replaced by the current earthquake-safe buildings. The new Fairfax High was rededicated in 1968. Because of a public campaign, the magnificent Rotunda and the 1,500-seat Swan Auditorium were preserved. The only other building to survive is Greenway Court, which was moved to its current location along Fairfax Avenue. For a semester after the earthquake of 1971, students from Los Angeles High and Fairfax High students shared the campus. Fairfax students went to school in the morning and LA High students attended in the afternoon.



Block print by student Robert Matz in 1939



Greenway Court Theater today

In the 1930s bleachers for Van Cleve field were added. In 1942, Greenway Court, a social hall, was built. Finally, Detter Court, named after the school's second principal, was completed in 1947.

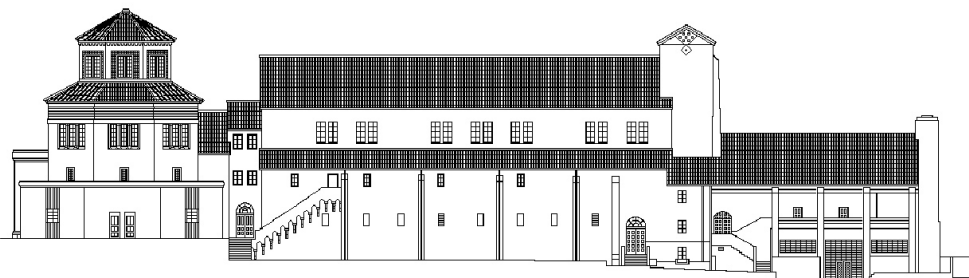
Fairfax High alumni boast of many celebrities such as Ricardo Montalban, Roger Wagner, David Janssen, and Herb Albert. In the sports world, alumni



Jack Kemp

For the first fifty years Fairfax High had the reputation of being one of the best schools in all of Los Angeles. It was local and students could walk to school. It was a place where parents could volunteer and be active in school activities. The campus had a distinctive architectural Spanish Colonial Revival design, which was lost to newer and larger modern structures. In many ways the newer structures resemble a prison with its high walls and grated windows and doors. Luckily, many of the old trees were

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Side view of the Rotunda and Swan Auditorium



A rendering of the new Fairfax High School campus in 1968

preserved and soften the effect.

During the last thirty years, Fairfax High lost its local flavor. Due to the lack of new school construction for decades and integration requirements, Fairfax High School grew dramatically. Fairfax High became a “receiver school” where students from outlying areas are bussed in.

As technology changed so did the curriculum. By the late 1990s all the shops classes disappeared. The once metal, auto, print and wood shops are long gone and



The old print shop in 1996



The computer lab that replaced the old print shop in 2005

have been replaced with a computer lab, ROTC and regular classrooms. In the past few years, overcrowding has required adding unsightly bungalows, which take up valuable parking space, a new two-story building, which reduces recreational space, and more busses, which crowd our parking lots and street curbs.

Recent successful bond measures have made important infrastructure changes such as providing air conditioning to each classroom, replacing old electrical conduit, improving outdoor lighting, laying new cable lines, replacing the tile roof of the auditorium, connecting classrooms to the internet, replacing blackboard with white board, and the list goes on. On the horizon is

In 1997 the Greenway Arts Alliance, a booster club that runs

the weekly Sunday “Melrose Trading Post” in the school parking lot, was born. Since then, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised to support clubs and student organizations. The Greenway Arts Alliance has also renovated Greenway Court and made it into the “Greenway Court Theater.”

another badly needed improvement—the painting of the entire school inside and out.

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Fairfax Adult School has undergone many changes as well. Since its beginning in 1945, the Fairfax Adult School has evolved into Westside Adult School,



The Melrose Trading Post on Sundays

which also offers classes to 15,000 adults on the high school campuses of Fairfax, Hamilton, University, and Palisades. Other daytime sites include West Hollywood Community Center and sixty other community locations.

Today Fairfax High is still an important center of the community. It is still a local landmark where locals still gather to be educated, to enjoy sports on its large playing fields on Saturday, to be entertained by a play at the Greenway Court Theater, and to shop for antiques on Sunday.

Looking to the future, Fairfax High may become a local school again. With the ongoing new construction of new high schools through out the District, six hundred fewer students will be bussed to Fairfax High next year.

If the trend continues, Fairfax High will gain become a local school where teenagers will be able to walk to school, learn in a less crowded and modern environment, and feel part of the community.



Fairfax High students tending the flower garden in front of the school