

# Spokane Register of Historic Places Nomination

*Spokane City/County Historic Preservation Office, City Hall, Third Floor  
808 Spokane Falls Boulevard, Spokane, Washington 99201-3337*

## 1. Name of Property

Historic Name: East Central Community Center

And/Or Common Name: Martin Luther King Jr Center at East Central

## 2. Location

Street & Number: 500 South Stone Street

City, State, Zip Code: Spokane, WA 99202

Parcel Number: 35211.4202

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public <input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> residential
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes, restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes, unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other

## 4. Owner of Property

Name: City of Spokane

Street & Number: 808 W Spokane Falls Blvd

City, State, Zip Code: Spokane, WA 99201

Telephone Number/E-mail: Jeff Teal, jteal@spokanecity.org; 509-625-6533

## 5. Location of Legal Description

Courthouse, Registry of Deeds Spokane County Courthouse

Street Number: 1116 West Broadway

City, State, Zip Code: Spokane, WA 99260

County: Spokane

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Title: East Central Historic and Cultural Context

Date: 2023 Federal State County Local

Depository for Survey Records: WISAARD

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

### Condition

- excellent  
good  
fair  
deteriorated  
ruins  
unexposed

### Check One

- unaltered  
altered

### Check One

- original site  
moved & date \_\_\_\_\_

*Narrative statement of description is found on one or more continuation sheets.*

## 8. Spokane Register Criteria and Statement of Significance

**Applicable Spokane Register of Historic Places criteria: Mark "x" on one or more for the categories that qualify the property for the Spokane Register listing:**

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Spokane history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory history.
- E Property represents the culture and heritage of the city of Spokane in ways not adequately addressed in the other criteria, as in its visual prominence, reference to intangible heritage, or any range of cultural practices.

*Narrative statement of significance is found on one or more continuation sheets.*

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

*Bibliography is found on one or more continuation sheets.*

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property:

3.86 acres

Verbal Boundary Description:

The property's legal description is Lots 1 through 12 of Block 28 and Lots 1 through 12 in Block 41 in the Union Park Addition. The building is on the northwest corner of the block which is bound by East Fifth Avenue, South Stone Street, East Hartson Street, and South Lee Street.

Verbal Boundary Justification:

Nominated property includes only the community center building.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name and Title: Logan Camporeale (Historic Preservation Specialist, Spokane City|County Historic Preservation Office)

Street, City, State, Zip Code: 808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd, Spokane, WA, 99201

Telephone Number: 509-625-6634

E-mail Address: lcamporeale@spokanecity.org

Date Final Nomination Heard:

**12. Additional Documentation**

*Additional documentation is found on one or more continuation sheets.*

**13. Signature of Owner(s)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**14. For Official Use Only:**

Date nomination application filed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Landmarks Commission Hearing: \_\_\_\_\_

Landmarks Commission decision: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of City Council/Board of County Commissioners' hearing: \_\_\_\_\_

**I hereby certify that this property has been listed in the Spokane Register of Historic Places based upon the action of either the City Council or the Board of County Commissioners as set forth above.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Megan Duvall** **Date**  
**City/County Historic Preservation Officer**  
City/County Historic Preservation Office  
Third Floor – City Hall  
808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.  
Spokane, WA 99201

Attest:

Approved as to form:

\_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant City Attorney

## SECTION 7: DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

### SUMMARY STATEMENT

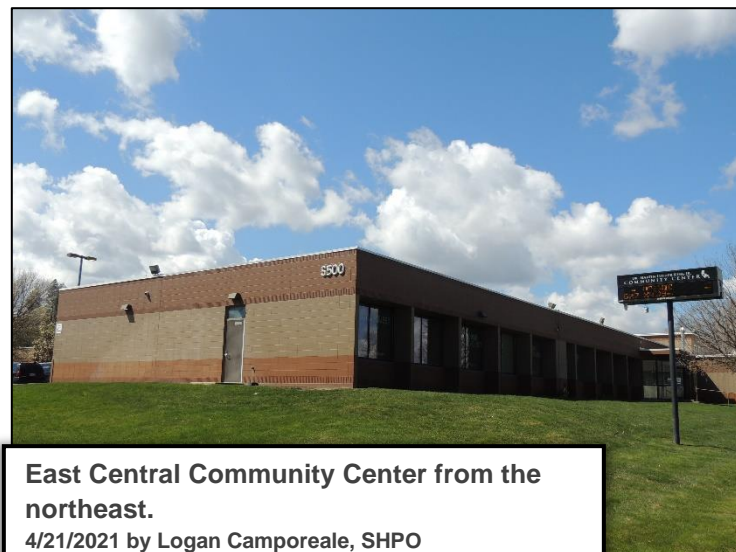
The East Central Community Center is an institutional building on a full block community-focused campus. The community center building is on the northwest corner of the block, which is bound by East Fifth Avenue, South Stone Street, East Hartson Street, and South Lee Street. The building, or some portion thereof, was originally constructed as an elementary school building, most of which was demolished at the time the community center was constructed in 1978. The building, as conceived in 1978, retains good integrity. The primary physical character defining features are the institutional form of the building, materials and the full block nature of the campus that has grown alongside the community.

The community center concept was initiated by the League of Women for Community Action and the building was developed collaboratively with the support of the City of Spokane using federal funds. The builder of the 1978 structure was the Max J. Kuney Company and the designer and engineer was the accomplished firm of Tan Brookie Kundig whose third namesake was the notable mid-century architect Moritz Kundig. The significance of the building under categories A and E allow for a less rigid treatment of the architectural significance and integrity.

### DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

The East Central Community Center was originally constructed as the Edison School in 1893 as a ten-room schoolhouse. The school was modified and added onto multiple times before it was largely demolished in 1977. A small portion of the building was retained and it received a large addition to convert it from a school to a community center. Building permits suggest that the 1978 project was a one-story addition of over 24,000 square feet at a cost of approximately one million dollars. The addition was constructed with block masonry cladding and a steel deck roof.<sup>1</sup>

East Central Community Center from the southwest, 500 South Stone Street  
4/21/2021 by Logan Camporeale, SHPO



East Central Community Center from the northeast.

4/21/2021 by Logan Camporeale, SHPO

The building is located in Spokane's Union Park Addition in the East Central Neighborhood. The building is approximately two miles from downtown Spokane as the crow flies. The neighborhood is tucked against Spokane's South Hill which forms the neighborhood's south boundary. It is punctuated by two notable parks: Liberty Park and Underhill

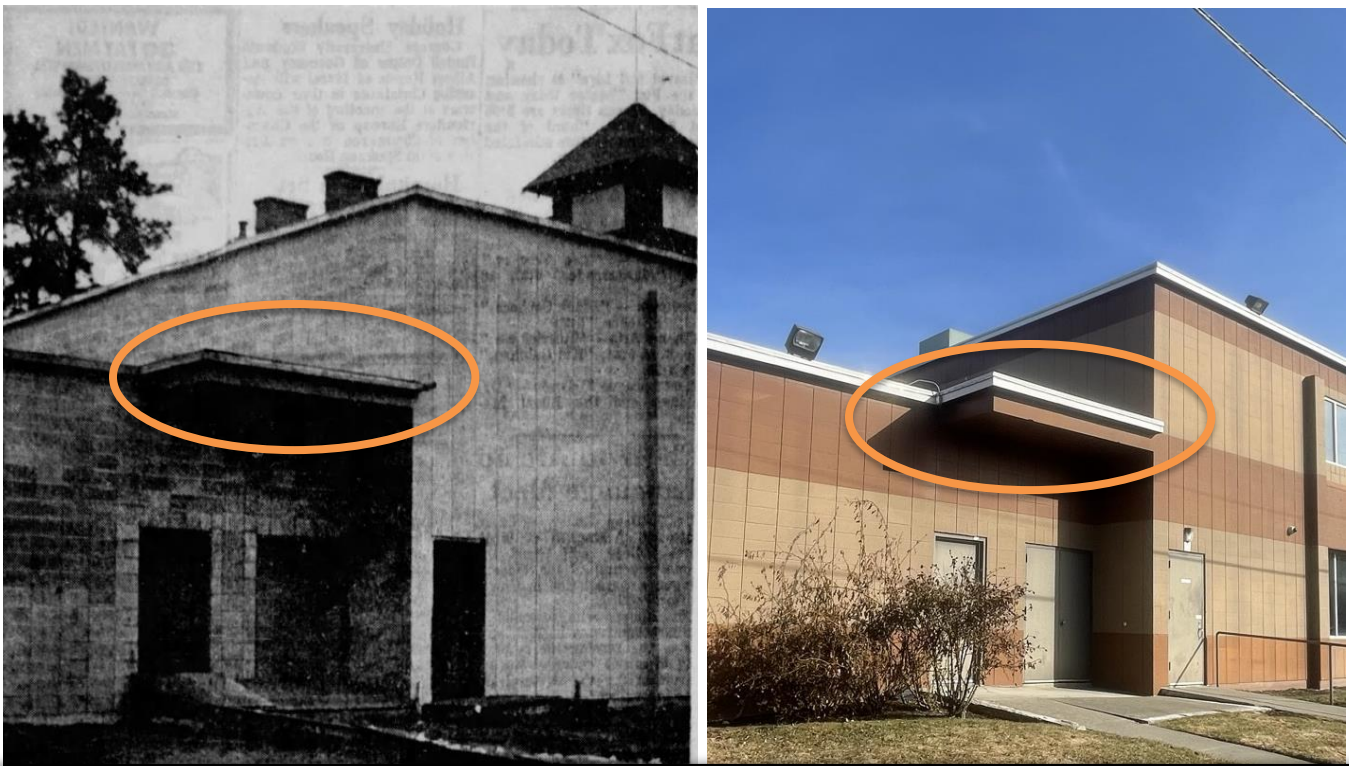
<sup>1</sup> City of Spokane Building Permits, 500 S Stone Street, Spokane Building Permit Archive.

Park. McKinley School was the elementary school for the northern half of the neighborhood and Edison School was the elementary school for the southern half.

It was historically a walkable and transit friendly neighborhood. Most services were located within walking distance, and those that were further were accessible by streetcar. From before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the late 1920s or early 1930s, the neighborhood was served by an electric railroad. The railroad provided access to downtown Spokane and beyond and it passed directly in front of the former Edison School on Fifth Avenue. The abandonment of the streetcar in the 1930s and the construction of the interstate highway beginning in the 1950s divided and isolated the neighborhood, and redefined its functional boundaries. Many services were cut off from residents in the southern half of the neighborhood which made the need for the community center even greater.

The sprawling design of the East Central Community Center prioritizes function over form. The building has an irregular footprint. It is constructed of concrete block with dividing courses of scored concrete blocks that simulate the appearance of a soldier course of bricks. There are three soldier courses on the one-story portion of the building, one at the floor, one at approximately eight feet high above the window openings, and one at the top of the wall. There is an additional fourth course on the 2019 addition, and there are eight courses on the gymnasium. There are no courses on the retained 1965 addition which helps to differentiate it from the newer construction. The roof is a flat built-up membrane roof with a 6-10 inch metal cornice wrapping the roofline. Most of the windows are metal sash plate glass windows and the windows on the north side are recessed with dividing walls between each window. Many of the entrances, like the windows, are recessed. The current paint scheme is alternating horizontal sections of two shades of brown, one light and one dark.

The majority of the building is one story, but there are sections on the southeast and northwest that appear taller than one story. The southeast section is a tall one story to accommodate the high-ceilinged gymnasium and the northwest section is two story. The two-story section on the northwest corner is the part of the Edison School



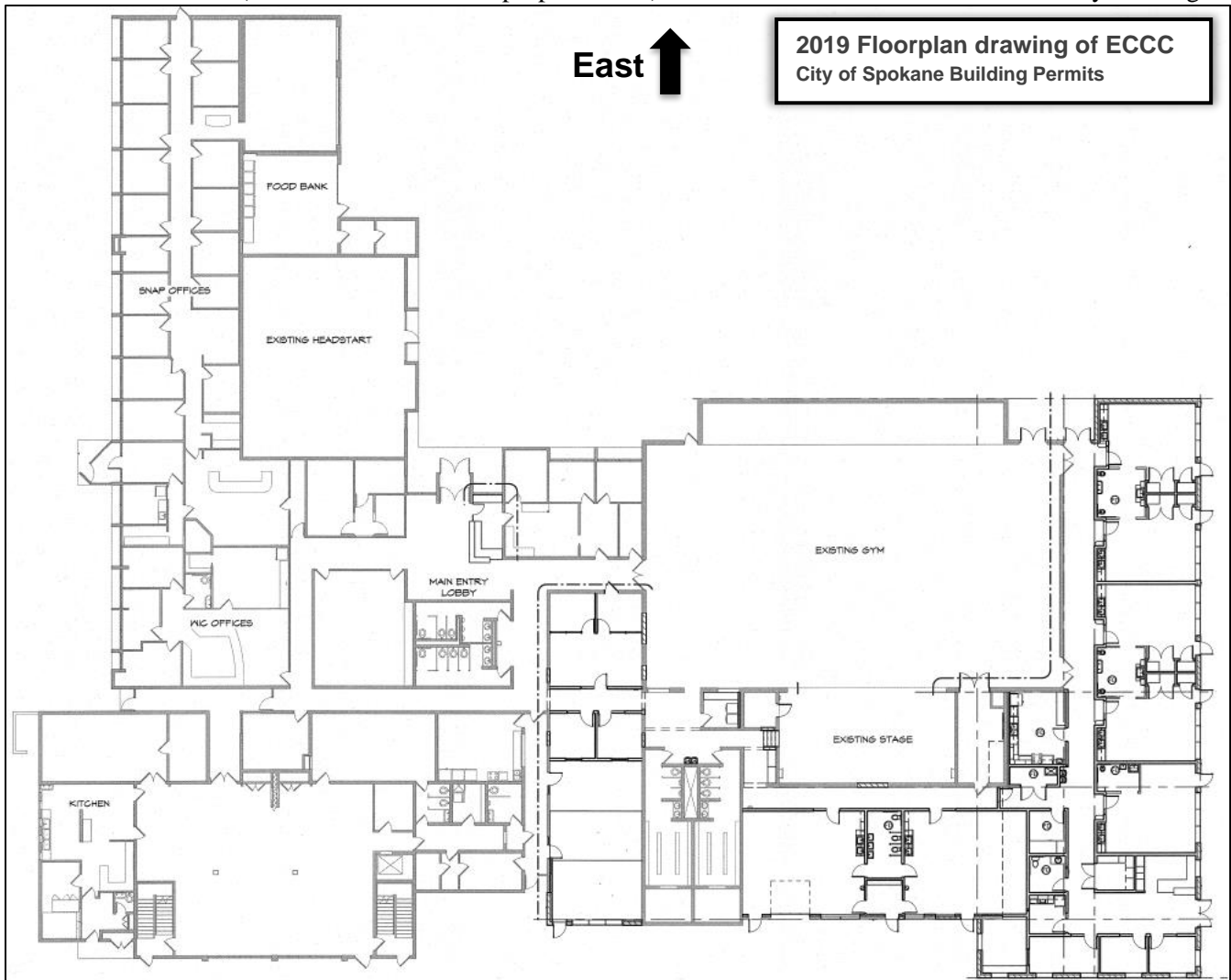
Photographs from the same location comparing 1965 with 2023. The 1965 multipurpose room was nearly completed in this photo and the awning is clearly still extant on the building today. Also notice the three doors and the two story vertical façade articulation on the right of each photo.

building that was retained at the time of redevelopment into a community center. The retained section of Edison School was formerly a gymnasium that was constructed as an addition to the Edison School in 1965. The 1965 addition is no longer used as a gymnasium and a second-floor plate was added to make it two stories. Recent work on the ground floor of the 1965 addition revealed gymnasium flooring beneath the carpet.

The building is approximately 280 feet long from north to south and approximately 140 feet wide from east to west. There is an approximately 7,000 square foot “L” shaped protrusion on the northeast corner where the building is approximately 230 feet wide. The primary entrance is located on the east elevation and is accessed from a parking lot with a small plaza in front of the primary entrance. The plaza includes an abstract sculpture and a simple mural on the wall that says “We Serve.” A secondary entrance on the south elevation provides access to the childcare facility. There is also what appears to be an entrance on the north elevation, however that entrance is not currently in use.

The building is designed in a late-20<sup>th</sup> century institutional style. Although the building was designed by the notable architectural firm Tan Brookie Kundig, it is a practical and affordable design with few eye-catching architectural details. The most notable extant character defining features are the concrete blocks that resemble soldier courses (which were notably copied in the 2019 addition, albeit with blocks of slightly different texture), the divided window bays on the north elevation, and the sharp angular design.

The interior of the building is an expansive 41,000 square feet. A building floorplan drawing from 2019 gives an idea of the various rooms and uses. The east wing includes the food bank, teen center, and office space. The northwest corner (which is the 1965 multipurpose room) is a commercial kitchen and cafeteria style dining



room. Above the dining room on the second floor is more office space. The gymnasium is located in the southeast corner of the building. Complete with a light-up scoreboard, the gym can be used for a variety of sports including basketball and volleyball. A set of retractable bleachers lines the east wall, and a stage is located on the west side. Classrooms wrap the south and west elevations. The main lobby is located on the east elevation just south of the east wing. It provides access to the entire building via a hallway system, however most program areas have their own entrances from the exterior as well.

The East Central Community Center is one of four buildings that comprise this community-focused block. The three additional buildings on the site include the East Central Senior Center in the southeast corner, the East Central Police Precinct (Eastside formerly the East Central Library) to the north of the senior center, and the CHAS Health and Dental Clinic in the southwest corner. The colocation of these service providers is an important design choice that allows for users of these services to take advantage of multiple services in one convenient location.

### ORIGINAL APPEARANCE & SUBSEQUENT MODIFICATIONS

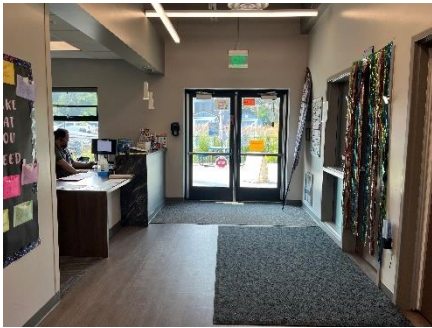
The East Central Community Center has not experienced many changes since its 1978 construction. The most significant change occurred in 2019 when a 5,820 square foot addition was constructed on the south elevation to increase space for infant childcare services. The addition was designed to closely match the 1978 structure. It includes concrete blocks that simulate a soldier course of bricks and in a slightly different texture which allows for differentiation. The 2019 addition also includes flat roof awnings over the entries which are not present on 1978 structure. There is, however, one flat roof awning on the 1965 multipurpose room. The outlined section in blue on the satellite imagery shows the footprint of the 2019 addition. There are a number of other small exterior changes like replaced windows, addition of garage doors, and the addition of a metal cornice. None of those changes impact the building's ability to convey its historic character.



**Aerial imagery of the East Central Community Center site in 1958 (left) and 2022 (right). Most or all of the historic structure was demolished but the 1965 addition (not pictured in the 1958 imagery) was retained and is extant.**

CURRENT APPEARANCE & CONDITION

**Interior:**



Childcare Center Entrance



Food Bank



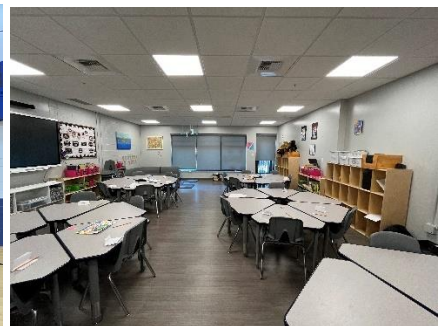
Teen Tech Center



Gym



Stage



Classroom



Meals On Wheels Dining Area



Meals on Wheels Kitchen



Classroom



SNAP Offices



Administrative Offices



Classroom



**East elevation:**



**North elevation:**



**West elevation:**



**South elevation:**



**Context from the northwest:**



## SECTION 8: NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Categories for Listing:** A and E  
**Areas of Significance:** Social/Humanitarian  
**Period of Significance:** 1978-2024  
**Built Date:** 1978  
**Architect:** Tan Brookie Kundig  
**Builder:** Max J. Kuney Company



**East Central Community Center from the northwest.**

4/21/2021 by Logan Camporeale, SHPO

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The East Central Community Center is an institutional community property in Spokane's East Central Neighborhood that is associated with Spokane's community center initiative of the late 1970s and 1980s that resulted in multiple community centers throughout Spokane.

The East Central Community Center has maintained its role as a community resource providing a variety of services for the community. A newspaper article from 1976 when the center was being contemplated stated that the goal of the center was to create "a social refuge for their elderly and young, a dispensing point for many human services." The mission remains the same in 2024. Freda Gandy, the director of the center in 2024, succinctly describes the community center as a "one-stop shop to meet the community's needs." That is not an exaggeration. Every corner of the building has a different community use, from teen center to senior cafeteria, and from infant day care to a provider who helps families cover their utility bills.<sup>2</sup>

The East Central Community Center is significant under two categories as established in Spokane Municipal Code 17D.100.020. The building is significant under Category A due to its association with the broad patterns of Spokane history particularly as the catalyst that initiated an era of community center construction in

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Roberts, "For Community Services, Edison Center Draws Debate," 12/12/1976, Section B Page 1.

Spokane. The building is also significant under Category E due to its association with Spokane's racially and ethnically diverse East Central community and particularly with the League of Women for Community Action.

The East Central Community Center is significant under Category A due to its association with Spokane's era of community center construction. The decade-long grassroots community effort to establish and build the East Central Community Center was a catalyst and model for other Spokane neighborhoods to open their own community center. The West Central Community Center opened in 1980 and the Northeast Community Center opened in 1982 following in the footsteps of East Central and using similar funding models to establish and build the centers. Furthermore, the Mayor of Spokane at the time East Central Community Center opened, Mayor Ron Bair, exclaimed that the center and its supporters had "become a model used by the rest of the United States."<sup>3</sup>

The East Central Community Center is exceptionally significant under Category E due to its deep association with the racially and ethnically diverse East Central Neighborhood and particularly with the influential community organization the League of Women for Community Action. The League was a group of approximately twenty-five Black women who were the primary advocates for the formation of the center and were the first provider to receive a contract from Spokane City Council to run the center.

Although a portion of the building remains from the Edison School which was previously on this site, the period of significance for the East Central Community Center begins at the time of redevelopment in 1978 and stretches to 2024 as the community center uses of the building continue at the time this nomination was prepared.

## SPOKANE HISTORIC CONTEXT: FROM TRIBAL LANDS TO BUSTLING CITY

The City of Spokane sits on the traditional lands of the Spokane Tribe. They have inhabited these lands since time immemorial. They hunted, fished, harvested, raised horses, traded, and made their homes in Spokane and surrounding areas. Government surveyors who mapped the area around the future site of the East Central Community Center in 1874 indicated that two native trails were in or nearby. One of the trails went from Liberty Park northwest toward Spokane Falls and the other went from Underhill Park to the southeast toward Glenrose area and the location of the Mullan Military Road. The map also shows that there was a spring located around Liberty Park which may have been a place of interest for local tribes.<sup>4</sup>

The Spokane's way of life was abruptly altered when white people began arriving in the region in the early 1800s. The North West Company, a Montreal based fur trading operation, built the Spokane House trading post at the confluence of the Spokane and Little Spokane River in 1810, marking the beginning of white settlement in the region. Settlement was initially slow, but by the late 1850s increasing numbers of white people were encroaching on tribal lands in pursuit of newly discovered gold in the Columbia River and its tributaries.

In the 1850s, the United States Army initiated a punitive campaign against a confederation of regional tribes, including the Spokanes, after the army was embarrassed by the tribes at the Battle of Steptoe Butte. The punitive campaign, under the leadership of General George Wright, engaged with and defeated the allied tribes at the Battle of Four Lakes and the Battle of Spokane Plains. After arriving at the Spokane River near present day Spokane Falls Community College, Wright's men proceeded east on the river destroying tribal food caches, taking tribal members captive, and ultimately slaughtering over 800 horses belonging to a confederation of the Plateau Indians, in an attempt to defeat the tribes by depleting their resources, an all-out war tactic.

The fighting ended in September 1858 with surrender of the tribe under the guise of a peace treaty. Instead of brokering peace diplomatically, General Wright murdered Sub-chief Qualchan and at least three fellow warriors on the shore of Hangman Creek. After the defeat of the Spokanes and surrounding tribes, the government began negotiating with and ultimately forcing the tribes onto reservations. In 1872, an executive order instructed

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Smith, "East Central Community Center Opens," 8/30/1979, page 10.

<sup>4</sup> James Tilton Sheets, GLO Map for Township 25 North Range 43 East, 1874, [https://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/survey/yGrid\\_ORWA.php?state=WA&ln=1000000](https://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/survey/yGrid_ORWA.php?state=WA&ln=1000000).

the Spokane Tribe to move to the original Colville Indian Reservation. The removal of the Spokanes and other regional tribes opened up the townsite of Spokane to homesteaders, and soon after settlers began arriving.<sup>5</sup>

The powerful Spokane River and its large waterfalls made an ideal location for a mill and ultimately a townsite. As the city grew and technology developed, the city's proximity to a waterfall allowed for easy access to hydroelectric power. The electricity produced from the river provided Spokane with a robust electrical system to homes, businesses, and the overhead power lines that criss-crossed the city powering a fleet of electric streetcars.

The City of Spokane grew quickly. In 1880, just a year before incorporation, there were only 350 white people living in the town of Spokan Falls. By the time of the next census in 1890, Spokane residents had dropped the "Falls" from their town's name (and added an "e") and the city's population had increased to 19,922 people. This rapid influx amounted to growth of over 5,500% in just one decade. The city's pace of exponential growth experienced a minor setback in August of 1889 when approximately thirty blocks of downtown Spokane were burned to the ground in a fast-moving fire. This left much of the city's core a blank slate from which a freshly constructed downtown of primarily brick masonry buildings rose from the ashes.<sup>6</sup>

Not discouraged from the fire, Spokane's rapid growth continued. The burgeoning mining, railroad, timber, and agriculture industries attracted tens of thousands of people who flocked to the Inland Northwest seeking new jobs and greater opportunities. By 1900, the number of Spokanites had grown to 36,848, most of which were working-class laborers, single women, and itinerant workers. That number continued to grow and when the 1910 census was taken, a decade after the turn of the century, 104,402 Spokane residents were counted. This influx of population brought the labor force and professionals necessary to grow regional business but it required quick construction of housing accommodations.

Population growth remained mostly stagnant in Spokane from 1910-1940, only adding approximately 18,000 residents. However, Spokane experienced a boom in the build up to World War II due to important war-time industry that was based here. Americans from other regions of the country, many of whom were Black, flocked to Spokane to fill the new job opportunities, sparking another population boom, bringing some 30,000 new residents during the 1940s and increasing the total population to 161,721. This influx in residents demanded more housing, some of which was created in Spokane's East Central Neighborhood.<sup>7</sup>

### EAST CENTRAL NEIGHBORHOOD<sup>8</sup>

The East Central Neighborhood, or Union Park Addition, developed into a substantial residential district during Spokane's period of greatest growth from 1900-1910. The neighborhood is located southeast of downtown Spokane and was originally separated from the core by the substantial 21-acre Liberty Park. Located near downtown and the railroad, the area was largely inhabited by working class Spokanites who were employed at the nearby businesses. The neighborhood has historically been home to a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse population including a Black and Italian-American community, many of whom still call the neighborhood home today.

Sanborn Maps suggest that East Central was substantially developed by 1910. Some of that growth was driven by Spokane's burgeoning Italian community. The Italian population in Spokane grew as Italians came to the United States by the millions. A small number of Italians, including notable families like the Scarpellis,

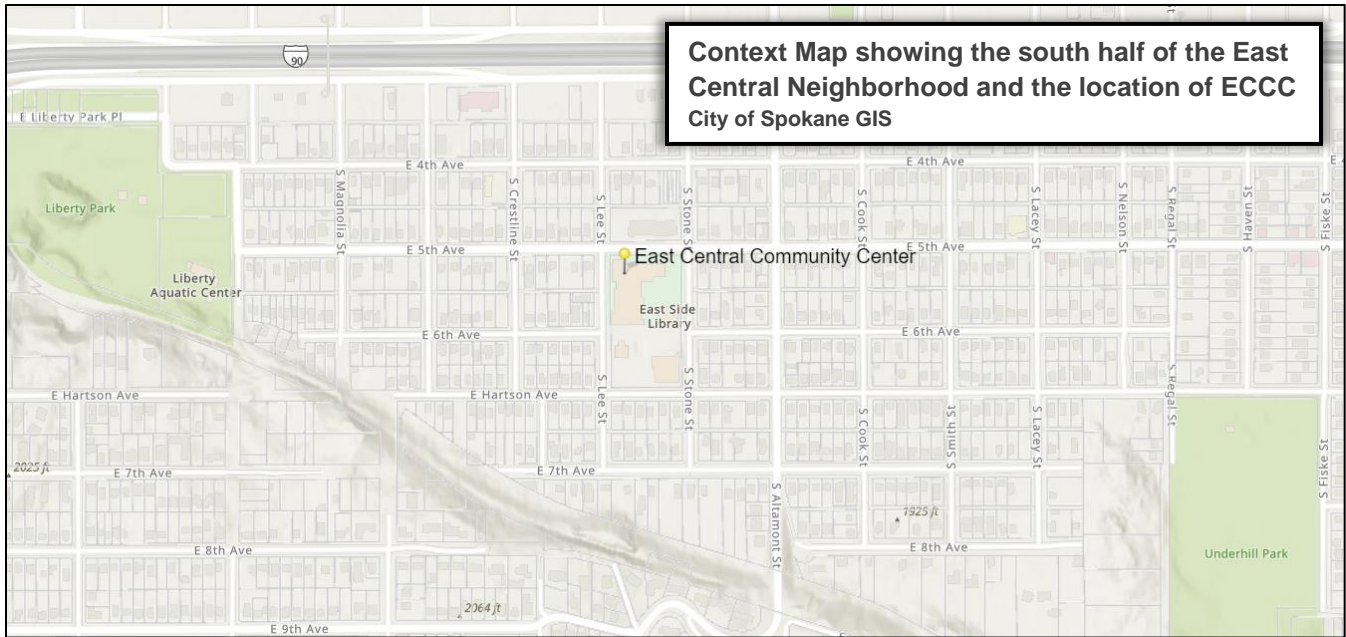
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<sup>5</sup> Warren Seyler, Ben Adkisson, *Spokane Tribal Wars of 1858*, directed by Trask McFarland (2017; Wellpinit, WA: VariusMedia), <https://youtu.be/-uN2juBAKlc>.

<sup>6</sup> Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division, "Decennial Census Counts of Population for the State, Counties, Cities and Towns," (Excel spreadsheet, Olympia, 2017), page 4.

<sup>7</sup> Washington State Office of Financial Management, "Decennial Census Counts of Population for the State, Counties, Cities and Towns," page 4.

<sup>8</sup> A brief context of the East Central Neighborhood is provided in this nomination but researchers interested in East Central should consult the East Central Historic Context and Survey produced by the Spokane Historic Preservation Office in 2022-2023 from which this shorter context was derived.

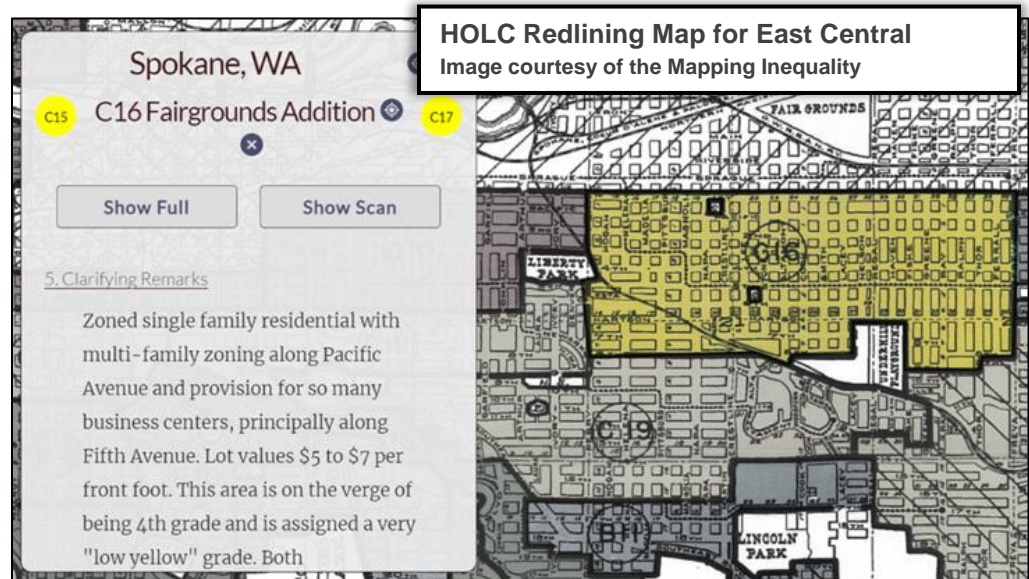


arrived in Spokane in the 1880s and 1890s. By the early 1900s, the *Spokane Press* reported that over 500 Italians were living in Spokane, amounting for nearly 2% of the population. In June of 1902, the first local Italian society was formed with the name Fratellanza Marconi. They soon changed their name to the Marconi Colombo Society and they celebrated their 20-year anniversary in 1923. The society was replaced by a new Sons of Italy club in 1928.<sup>9</sup>

The rise in Spokane’s Italian population directly correlates with the period of greatest residential development and growth in East Central. Many of the Italian families who moved into the neighborhood from 1905-1925 had arrived in Spokane a decade earlier and had earned enough money to purchase or rent a house. By 1938, foreign-born Italian families accounted for upwards of 10% of the residents in East Central.<sup>10</sup>

As some Italian families moved out of East Central in the midcentury, many Black families began to fill their place. The Black Spokanites who were increasingly steered into East Central starting in the 1940s became proud residents of and advocates for their neighborhood despite federal policies that made it nearly impossible to leverage the equity in their properties to borrow money for improvements or investment opportunities.

But, housing segregation in Spokane was not just something that happened organically, it was the



<sup>9</sup> “Italians Plan Annual Picnic,” *Spokane Chronicle*, 5/22/1925; “Something About the Italian Community of Spokane,” *Spokane Press*, 1/16/1903; “‘Sons of Italy’ Club in Spokane,” *Spokane Chronicle*, 4/18/1928.

<sup>10</sup> HOLC Redlining Maps, Spokane.

result of de jure<sup>11</sup> policies and laws. In January of 1938, surveyors from the Federal Government's Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) arrived in Spokane for a survey project to classify residential districts into four classes based on the supposed creditworthiness of prospective buyers and borrowers. The Spokane survey was led by Theodore S. Bowden who met with a local mortgage group, the Spokane Mortgage Men's Association, while he was in Spokane working on the project.

According to the HOLC Map for Spokane from 1938, the East Central Neighborhood was colored yellow on the map and classified as "definitely declining." Although prospective buyers in yellow zones had an easier time securing loans than buyers in redlined neighborhoods, it was still much more difficult to secure a loan in this area. According to the remarks on the map, this area was "on the verge of being 4th grade and is assigned a very 'low yellow' grade. Both improvements and population are extremely heterogeneous in character and the Northeastern part of the area will undoubtedly become 'hazardous' in the course of time." The HOLC was forecasting the future of the East Central Neighborhood by setting the conditions that would almost guarantee that result.

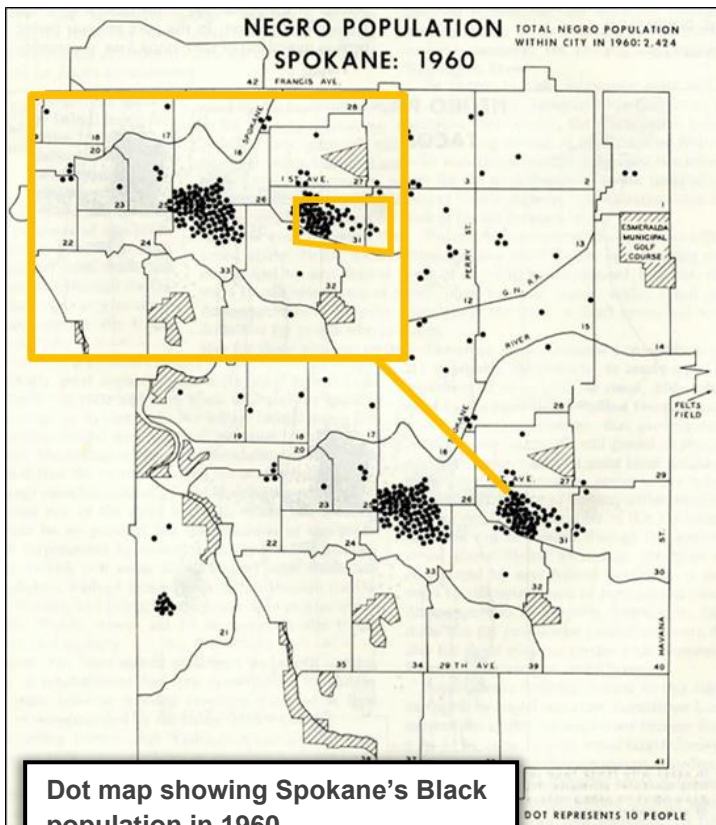
The HOLC's red and yellow designations had long-lasting impacts on the ability of residents to improve their living conditions and to accumulate generational wealth. Prospective buyers of their properties were unable to secure loans preventing them from using the capital to purchase a larger home or a home in a different neighborhood. These designations also made it much harder for property owners to secure home equity lines of credit that could be used to improve or maintain properties within the area.

Not only would it be difficult for a Black resident in East Central to sell their property since most buyers could not get a loan to purchase it, even if they could find a buyer the options for other neighborhoods that allowed Black residents were limited. Even if it was possible to sell, it was hard to find a place to move. Unlike

Italians who had found upward mobility and moved out of East Central, that process (a step in the American dream) was less accessible to Black Spokaneites who were restricted to specific neighborhoods due to the color of their skin.

The tools to enforce housing segregation and to steer Black Spokaneites into East Central were effective. In 1950, about the time J.W. Strong said housing segregation became more pronounced in Spokane, only 58 Black residents lived in Census Tract 30/31 which surrounded the 5th Avenue Business District and the East Central Community Center. There were three census tracts on the north side with the same or greater number of Black residents than in Tract 30/31. The city was not yet as segregated either, with 42% of the city's Black population living in three census tracts.

By 1960, there were 586 Black residents in Census Tract 30/31, an increase of 910% in just ten years! Likewise, the city at large became more segregated in those ten years, and by 1960 71.6% of the city's Black residents were living in just 3 census tracts. The area around the 5th Avenue



**Dot map showing Spokane's Black population in 1960.**  
 A 1968 Report on Race and Violence in WA

<sup>11</sup> De jure segregation policies refers to segregation this is mandated or supported by the government, as opposed to de facto segregation which just happens by chance or choice.

Business District became a residential center of Spokane's Black community in just one decade.

This was also the period of the greatest "white flight" from East Central. Between 1950 and 1970 the white population in Census Tract 30/31 was cut in half, and the percentage of white residents in the Tract decreased from 98% to 76%. This tells the story of the upward mobility of white immigrant families. It also shows that white families fled the neighborhood once the federal government had deemed it less desirable in their redlining maps, and once nonwhite residents started increasing in number.

The dot map of Spokane's Black population in 1960 shows the impact of housing segregation on the density of Spokane's Black population. The detail pop out on the map shows the densest concentration of Black residents in downtown and East Central. When the 1938 Redlining Maps were created, East Central's Black population made up about 1% of the total which was similar to the city as a whole. But by 1960 it's evident that the Black population in East Central was larger than anywhere in the city except for downtown. According to former Mayor Jim Chase, Spokane's first and only Black Mayor, "Black Spokane, by geographic location, is defined as roughly Third to Ninth, between Division and the 4000 block east." The census data shows that Chase was accurate.<sup>12</sup>

Black families began moving into East Central in greater numbers the 1950s and 1960s. In many cases, they were steered into the neighborhood with limited other choices and proceeded to make it their own. Likewise, Black Spokanites opened businesses along the 5th Avenue Business Corridor. One Black business is emblematic of the transition to a Black neighborhood, Larry's Afro Barber Shop. Larry apprenticed with the original owner, a white man, in the 1960s whom he ultimately purchased the building and shop from in 1978. He continued to operate his barber shop at the same location in 2024.

## THE EDISON SCHOOL

The building at 500 South Stone Street was originally constructed as the Union Park School in 1893. It was first built as a ten-room brick schoolhouse. The name of the school changed to Edison School within a handful of years of opening. Named after the famous inventor Thomas Edison, the school grew to be one of the largest in Spokane School District by the first decade of the 1900s. The school was expanded in 1903-04 and continued to grow until the school was reduced from K-8 to K-6 in 1919.



Photo of Edison School circa 1910.  
Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture

The school attendance shrunk from over 800 students down to the 200s and by the 1940s, discussions about closing the school had begun. Through the mid-century period, the school had a significant Black student population and was socioeconomically disadvantaged. According to a 1968 newspaper article, 42.2% of the Edison student population was Black. Compare that to the overall Black student population of the entire school district at less than 2%. Only a dozen other schools in Washington State had a larger percent of Black students than Edison School, and all twelve of those were located in Seattle or Tacoma. Black civil rights attorney Carl Maxey called the school one of the poorest in Washington State in 1966.<sup>13</sup>

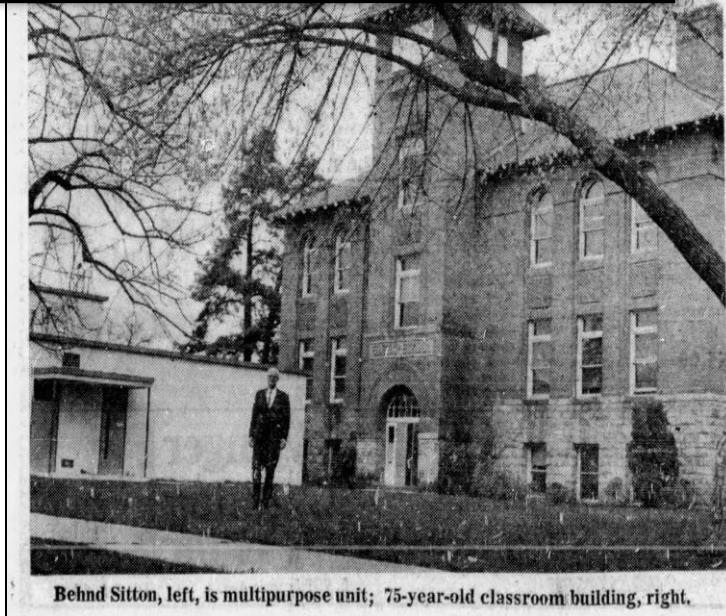
<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Powers, "The Negro Viewpoint: Spokane's Negroes speak out on education, housing, employment and the outlook for their youngsters," *Spokesman-Review Sunday Magazine*, 4/21/1968, page 6.

<sup>13</sup> Spokane Public Schools, *First Class for 100 Years*, "Edison School," page 26; "Kindergarten Need Stressed," *Spokane Chronicle*, 3/26/1968. Page 17.



Photo of Edison School in 1968 showing the new multipurpose room on the left.

*Spokesman-Review*, 1/24/1969



Behnd Sitton, left, is multipurpose unit; 75-year-old classroom building, right.

There were efforts to bring the school up to standards in the 1960s. In 1965, a \$100,000 six thousand square foot multi-purpose room was added to the historic schoolhouse that up to that point had no cafeteria or gymnasium. The concrete block addition was designed by architect Willis E. James. It was supposed to be the first of a four-phase improvement plan to the school.<sup>14</sup>

Efforts to bring the school up to standards fell short, despite community advocacy. The Residents of East Area Combined to Help, or REACH, were formed with the purpose of relating to “the school board the conditions of our school building facilities in the eastern area.” One of the group’s organizers, Frank Williams, told the newspaper that “the deterioration of our facilities reflects the deterioration of our neighborhood.” He continued saying that east central residents “feel they have been fighting a losing battle” in getting proper

funding and attention for their school facilities.<sup>15</sup>

It was not only local policies that were frustrating Edison School advocates, but state policies were also getting in the way. *Spokesman-Review* reporter Jim Smith started a 1968 newspaper article with the question: “Can a school divided statistically into three parts white and two parts black survive?” He continued to say that Edison “parents do not expect destruction of their school to come from within their neighborhood. They fear state policies will force them to send their children to other schools.” He continued in explaining the policy he was referencing: “any school with 40 percent or more of its pupils being of a minority race is regarded as a segregated school in Washington” and that the state’s “stated goal has been to eliminate segregated schools.” One of the strategies to eliminate those schools was “to deny construction funds to any building project that would perpetuate segregation.” Mrs. Allie L. Bly, President of the Edison Parent-Teacher Association said that the organization was “opposed to the closing of the school” and that the parents did not “want our children being bussed out of the neighborhood.” The article closed with a powerful statement: “in this neighborhood, school is a popular place.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1969, Spokane civic leader and government employee Elanor Chase, wife of politician Mayor Jim Chase, claimed that there was “de facto segregation” at Edison School and stating that most of the city’s Black students went to school there. While de facto forces may have contributed to segregation in East Central, in hindsight it is clear that de jure segregation had equal or greater impact on the racial composition of the school. Whether that was federal policies like redlining, or local policies like restrictive covenants and school district boundaries.<sup>17</sup>

Despite a difficult funding landscape and the constant threat of school closure, neighborhood advocates continued to do good work. In 1970, the East Area Pre-Schools were operating a free kindergarten in the basement of Edison School which garnered a feature article in the *Spokesman-Review*. The preschool was lauded for being free to attend, racially diverse, and for providing critical early learning to the neighborhood. The schools finance chairman, Mrs. Connie Bagby (artist, philanthropist, and wife of noted surgeon Gerooge W. Bagby), said that the group was caring for at least 57 preschoolers and were “really doing this on a shoestring” with a lot of

<sup>14</sup> “Teacher Pay Hike Proposals Outlined,” *Spokane Chronicle*, 3/11/1965, page 18.

<sup>15</sup> “East Side Asks School Help,” *Spokane Chronicle*, 1/14/1970, page 5.

<sup>16</sup> Jim Smith, “Edison School: History Won’t Help,” *Spokesman-Review*, 6/30/1968.

<sup>17</sup> “Action, Not Talk, Called Need to Aid Minorities,” *Spokesman-Review*, 2/5/1969, page 6.



**A group of Edison School students playing ball together.**

*Spokesman-Review*, 6/30/1968

**Edison pupils romp together vigorously as parents strive to keep neighborhood school alive.**

community support. They received donations from churches, community advocates, regular citizens, and a variety of organizations. They also received an art piece from notable artist Harold Balazs (who was likely friends with fellow artist Connie Bagby) that could be used as a climbing structure. One mother quoted in the article explained that the “kindergarten is good preparation for the children” and that her “little girl hates it if she ever has to miss because she is ill.”<sup>18</sup>

After decades of debate about the future of the school, a failed levy by Spokane voters in 1972 was the death knell for Edison School. It, along with eight other elementary schools in the district, was closed in the wake of the levy failure. Edison School was selected for closure versus other schools in the district (it would be interesting to map the locations of all the closed schools from that year).

The closing of Edison School had impacts beyond education. In the 1972 general election, East Central resident’s typical polling place at the Edison School was moved to a new location forcing residents to walk more than a mile additional to cast their ballots. On that ballot was the school district’s levy proposal that could have extended funding to Edison School and revived it as an elementary school. The closing of the Edison School was very much a self-fulfilling prophecy by policy makers.<sup>19</sup>



**A group of Edison School students playing on the Balazs statue (current location is unknown).**

*Spokesman-Review*, 2/15/1970

<sup>18</sup> Dorothy R. Powers, “East Area Kindergarten Is Free, Fun, Educational,” *Spokesman-Review*, 2/15/1970.

<sup>19</sup> “Redrawing of Precincts Said Due,” *Spokane Chronicle*, 10/19/1972, page 3.

## THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

In May of 1969, Betty Jean Richey, Charline Marie Hopkins, and Nellie Lay filed an application with the Washington Secretary of State to incorporate the League of Women for Community Action. The group's stated purposes were "charitable, benevolent, educational, civic, social, and particularly for the purpose of setting up a day care center." The application identified the original board of directors which included five members: Carol Richey, Rosa Anna Coats, Jimmie Lee Kinard, Mae Belle Hawkins, and Lula Mae Montgomery. When the group was formed, three of the five directors resided near the East Central Community Center and one (Rosa Anna Coats) resided in a house that was ultimately demolished for the Liberty Park Interchange.<sup>20</sup>

The League's original membership was comprised of approximately twenty-five Black women from east Spokane, most of whom were mothers that felt a day care center was desperately needed on the east side. They held true to their mission and saw results quickly. In 1970, only a year after incorporation, they opened a day care center, officially known as the Southeast Community Day Care Center. The center was originally located at 2430 East Pacific in a church, but the size of the space was instantly an issue and the League was almost immediately looking for a more suitable space.<sup>21</sup>

The center was partially funded by the Spokane City Council, the Head Start program, and by community development funds. Their relationship with City Council also appears to have been strong, because in 1978, they broke ground on a building that would house the day care center on the old Edison School site and in 1980 the city offered to lease the land near the former Edison School on South Stone Street to the League on favorable terms of \$1.00 rent per year. The organization also had financial support from the Washington Commission for the Humanities who helped fund their outreach and educational activities.<sup>22</sup>

## **Ceremony Marks Site Clearing**

A ceremony was planned this afternoon at the old Edison School, S515 Lee, to commemorate the first step toward construction of an East Central Neighborhood Community Center on the site.

The ceremony—as destruction of the building began—was to be a highlight of Septemberfest, a neighborhood festival sponsored by the League of Women for

Community Action.

Lee A. Wade, project director, said the festival would include walking and riding tours of the neighborhood, displays of photos and art presenting "images" of the neighborhood, a fashion show, arts and crafts displays and entertainment by various ethnic groups.

When completed next fall, the community center will

provide facilities for health care and social services, a new branch of the Spokane Public Library, a gymnasium and cultural center, meeting rooms and space for other activities.

Budgeted at nearly \$1 million, the center is the first to be constructed by the city using federal community development funds.

Newspaper clipping reporting on the ceremony marking redevelopment of the community center site.  
*Spokesman-Review*, 9/20/1979

<sup>20</sup> Articles of Incorporation for the League of Women for Community Action, Washington Secretary of State, Washington State Digital Archives; Carol Shook, letter to City of Spokane regarding East Central Community Center renaming and historic designation," 7/1/2019; "20 Filings Announced for New Corporations," *Spokane Chronicle*, 7/5/1969, page 2; "Action League Support Told," *Spokane Chronicle*, 10/10/1969, page 15;

<sup>21</sup> "'For Day Care Center: Community Help Sought,'" *Spokesman-Review*, 11/7/1969, page 6; "Action Unit Votes for Kindergartens," *Spokesman-Review*, 7/17/1969, page 6; "'Day of Concern' Includes Panel on Housing Issue," 5/27/1969, page 6; Alden Cross, "East Side Day Care Dream Ready for Opening Monday," *Spokesman-Review*, 5/25/1970, page 11; Dorothy Powers, "Each Black Woman Walks Lonely Road to 'Personal Identity,'" *Spokesman-Review*, 1/14/1973.

<sup>22</sup> "Social Action Success," *Spokane Chronicle*, 4/27/1978; "Ceremony Set at Edison," *Spokesman-Review*, 4/29/1978, page 16; Agreements between the City of Spokane and the League of Women for Community Action, City of Spokane Public Records Database, 2/27/1980 and 9/25/1980.

Providing a resource for day care was critical to Spokane's working class. Much as the situation is in 2020s, it was impossible for parents (especially single parents) of children under five years old to go to work during the day and earn a paycheck to provide for their family if they did not have any access to affordable childcare. Additionally, the Southeast Community Day Care Center endeavored to provide services to children including medical, dental and education. The center also employed social workers who could connect with parents and try to meet their individual needs as well.<sup>23</sup>

Additional to the day care, the center provided a space in the neighborhood for important community meetings. The NAACP met there regularly. The meetings hosted at the center included: community workshops, lectures on Black history in Spokane, programming for Black teens, lectures that featured Carl Maxey, their 76<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, and their general membership meetings. The location would have been especially convenient for the members who lived in the East Central including John K. Carpenter (2103 East Hartson) who held a leadership position with the group serving as a committee chairperson.<sup>24</sup>

The League of Women for Community Action was officially dissolved as a corporation in 1986, however the organization continues to exist today in some form. A day care and community center continues to operate in the building the League constructed. And, importantly, the League and their center inspired other neighborhoods to pursue community and day care centers throughout Spokane. The *Spokesman-Review* remarked that East Central's "determined hard-working residents could be considered inspiring pathfinders for those in other parts of the city." In 1980, West Central followed suit, and in 1982 Northeast Spokane opened a center too.<sup>25</sup>

Lee Wade had an outsized influence on East Central's trajectory. She was involved in so many East Central neighborhood groups and organizations that a newspaper reporter in 1990s summarized Wade's involvement in the community: "well, if it's East Central, she's on it." Wade was a founding member of the League of Women for Community Action and the East Central Community Organization, she served on the East Central Steering Committee and the East Central Advisory Board, and she was involved with the first neighborhood council in East Central. Wade was appointed to the City Plan Commission where she seems to have served as a conduit between East Central and the city to share with other parts of the city the grassroots community advocacy strategies that had benefited East Central. She was also involved with community development funds and their distribution in East Central. In 1979, she participated in a city advertising campaign to encourage folks to participate in the community development process at the grassroots level because "that's where the nitty gritty action starts."<sup>26</sup>

Lee Wade remained active with the East Central Community Center into the 2000s. In a 2001 newspaper article she said, "in my view, we have exceeded our goals and beyond." The center did its job of helping to ease hunger, illness, unemployment, loneliness, crime, and family problems.<sup>27</sup>

**How do I get in on the action?**

"First, you are invited to the Neighborhood Congress Saturday, Sept. 22 at our beautiful new East Central Community Center, 5th and Stone. You'll meet a lot of your neighbors in Spokane and guests from other cities who got started just like you—because they cared enough to get involved.

The most important thing is to attend your neighborhood meeting, because that's where the nitty-gritty action starts. It takes a lot of work and you've gotta be persistent, but it can really make a difference—look at our Community Center!"

LEE WADE

**Newspaper advertisement for the grand opening of the ECCC featuring Community leader Lee Wade.**  
*Spokesman-Review*, 9/20/1979

<sup>23</sup> Cross, "Day Care Centers Seen Vital to Poor," *Spokesman-Review*, 3/23/1970, page 5.

<sup>24</sup> "NAACP to Celebrate Birthday," *Spokane Chronicle*, 2/15/1985, page 11; "Social Action Success," *Spokane Chronicle*, 4/27/1978; "Bulletin Board: Lectures: 'N.A.A.C.P. in the 80's'," *Spokesman-Review*, 2/14/1985, page 54.

<sup>25</sup> "Long Citizen Effort Successful," *Spokesman-Review*, 2/8/1978, page 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ward Sanderson, "Lee Wade Pours Decades of Service into East Central Area," *Spokesman-Review*, 10/17/1996. Page 6; "How Do I Get in on the Action?," *Spokane Chronicle*, 9/20/1979, page 32.

<sup>27</sup> Mike Prager, "Still a Special Place: East Central Community Center continues to serve its original mission," *Spokesman-Review*, 3/15/2001, South Side Voice Page 2.

**THE EAST CENTRAL  
 COMMUNITY CENTER**

After the Edison School closed, the district leased the building to the city for a youth center for a few years, foreshadowing the site's future long-term use. After years of advocacy from the community, especially the League of Women for Community Action in 1977 Edison School was demolished except for a mid-century addition that was retained. With funding from community development grants and other sources, in its place the East Central Community Center was constructed with the mission to provide day care services, youth activities, education, and other community services that the League had provided in their previous locations. The notable architectural firm Tan Brookie Kundig was contracted to design the new building. The center had a soft opening in June of 1979 and was fully completed by early 1980. In 1980 the city offered to lease the center on South Stone Street to the League on favorable terms of \$1.00 rent per year.<sup>28</sup>

Photos from the grand opening of the ECCC in 1979.  
 Spokane Chronicle, 10/1/1979



**Festive Opening**

Saturday's formal dedication of the East Central Community Center was a festive event. Among the artists exhibiting their work was Dennis Wilson, with his oil painting, "Mus-

cal Odyssey." The youngsters at right were waiting in a dressing room before going on stage during a fashion show. The center is at S500 Stone.

Community programming at the community center has been constant from the moment it opened to the present. There are over 6000 articles in the Spokane newspapers that have the phrase "East Central Community Center" between 1976 and the present. The vast majority are advertisements for community events. This

illustrates how much programming and how often events were held and advertised at the center. The grand opening of the center was held in September of 1979, but the NAACP had already been meeting there for months since the soft opening. In November 1979 the center screened a film called "A Brief History of Black Americans in Spokane County." And in the 1980s, the Citizens for Fair Power Rates met at the center.

<p><b>DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING</b>  <b>CITY OF SPOKANE</b>  <b>BUILDING PERMIT</b></p>		<p>No. B- 21233</p>	
<p>Application Accepted By <u>lms</u></p>		<p>Approved for Issuance By <u>[Signature]</u> Date <u>4/28/78</u></p>	
<p>Job Address <u>South 515 Lee</u></p>		<p>Parcel # <u>                    </u> Master File # <u>00450</u></p>	
<p>Lot No. <u>1 thru 12</u> Block's <u>20 &amp; 41</u></p>		<p>Addition <u>Union Park</u></p>	
<p>Owner <u>City of Spokane</u> Address <u>N. 221 Wall</u> Phone: <u>                    </u></p>		<p>Contractor <u>Max J. Kuney Co.</u> Address <u>N 120 Ralph 99202</u> Phone: <u>535-0641</u></p>	
<p>State License No. <u>223-01-KU-NE-YM-J372ND</u> Expiration Date <u>5-1-78</u></p>		<p>Engineer Architect <u>Tan Brookie Kundig</u> Address <u>N 117 1/2 Howard</u> Phone: <u>747-8043</u></p>	
<p>Class of Work</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NEW</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ADDITION</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ALTERATION</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> REPAIR</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> RELOCATION</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> DEMOLITION</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> LAND USE</p>	<p>Building Class</p> <p>single fam. res.</p> <p>duplex</p> <p>apartments</p> <p>res. garage/carport</p> <p>fence/swimming</p> <p>swimming pools</p> <p>mobile home (park)</p> <p>hotel/motel</p> <p>rec/amusement</p> <p>church/religious</p> <p>industrial</p> <p>parking garage</p> <p>service sta./ repair ga</p> <p>hospital/institutional</p> <p>office/bank/professional</p>	<p>Present use: <u>School</u></p> <p>Proposed use: <u>Neighborhood Center</u></p>	<p>FOR WORK TO BE DONE:</p> <p>dimensions <u>150</u> x <u>200</u></p> <p>total stories <u>1</u> main floor area <u>+24,840</u></p> <p>basement area <u>--</u> finished <u>                    </u></p>
<p>Change in # DU <u>--</u></p> <p>Const. Type <u>V 1-hr, VN</u></p> <p>Fire Zone <u>3</u></p> <p>Occupancy <u>A2.1, A3</u></p> <p>Group <u>B2 I41</u></p>		<p><b>Building permit for the 1978 ECCC showing Tan Brookie Kundig as architects.</b>                  City of Spokane Building Permit Archive</p>	

In 1982, famous poet, author, actor, and thinker Maya Angelou visited the East

<sup>28</sup> Agreements between the City of Spokane and the League of Women for Community Action, City of Spokane Public Records Database, 2/27/1980 and 9/25/1980.



Central Community Center to give a lecture. The lecture was sponsored by Eastern Washington University's Black Education Program as part of their 1982 Black History Month programming which was themed "Blueprint for Survival." Angelou, likely perched on the stage that remains in the center's gymnasium today, gave her lecture to a diverse audience of 300 attentive listeners. She opined on the Black experience, the lack of knowledge of Black history in the United States, and she recited multiple poems. She received four standing ovations during her presentation, and she took questions from the audience.<sup>29</sup>

In 1999, Governor Gary Locke visited the center in an effort to boost reading proficiencies amongst East Central youth. In the 2000s the center hosted breathing relaxation classes and a free youth baseball clinic. And East Central Community Center's long and robust legacy as a community meeting space continues today with the Kiwanis Club hosting a free pancake breakfast at the center in 2022.<sup>30</sup>

In 2019-2020, there was debate over the name of the center as a new operator, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center, was selected to run it. Freda Gandy, Director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center, was a proponent of the name change because it would give the organization "a sense of identity here in this building" and would "cut down on a lot of confusion." Longtime East Central advocate and founding member of the center, Lee Wade, who was 92 years old in early 2020, was opposed to the name change too. She explained that "we were a group of women who got together, rolled our sleeves up, and decided we were going to do something about the condition of all the people." To her, having East Central in the center's name was reflective of the people who founded it and the people they served in a way that King's name did not convey. After contentious debate and a recommendation against renaming from the City Plan Commission, the Spokane City Council voted for a compromise to change the name to the Martin Luther King Jr. Center at East Central.<sup>31</sup>

Then, in 2022 there was significant debate about the siting of a police substation in an adjacent building on the site, the former East Central Library building. Despite the occasional disagreement and turnover in operators, the mission remains the same: to serve the East Central community. Today the community center sits

<sup>29</sup> "Community Digest," *Spokesman-Review*, 11/17/1979, page 12; Tom Sowa, "Counter Culture: Of Women and Words," *Spokesman-Review*, 1/24/1982, page 44; Jennifer Williamson, "Maya Angelou: Walking Proud, Head Unbowed," *Spokane Chronicle*, 1/30/1982, page 3.

<sup>30</sup> Carlos Acevedo, "Governor Seeks Volunteers to Help Kids with Reading," *Spokesman-Review*, 9/30/1999.

<sup>31</sup> Adam Shanks, "Name Packs a Punch," *Spokesman-Review*, 2/1/2020, page 1; Adam Shanks, "City Renames Community Center," *Spokesman-Review*, 2/10/2020, page C1.

on a campus with many additional community centered buildings including: CHAS Dental Clinic, the Martin Luther King Junior Center, and the East Central Senior Center.<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The East Central Community Center is a significant Spokane community building that provides an opportunity to tell the story of a whole Spokane neighborhood and an important community group that lifted that neighborhood by fighting tirelessly for the construction of the community center.

The East Central Community Center was the first neighborhood community center in Spokane. The grassroots organizers leveraged city and federal funds to provide an important resource for their community that still serves in that role at the time this nomination was prepared in 2024. The community center was the catalyst to kickoff the era of community center construction in Spokane leaving an important legacy on the development of modern community spaces in Spokane. The West Central Community Center, Northeast Community Center, and the Southside Community Center all followed the path charted by East Central, and all of those centers remain important community resources in 2024.

The East Central Community Center is the building most associated with League of Women for Community Action. The League was a powerful organizing force that collectively gave Black women a voice in city affairs and advocated for their needs which were being overlooked by city officials and other community groups. Their advocacy was singlehandedly responsible for the construction of Spokane's first community center. Although the League does not exist in the same form as it did in 1978, it serves as an important example of the power of cultural organizations and the importance of memorializing their legacies.

The East Central Community Center is significant under two categories as established in Spokane Municipal Code 17D.100.020. The building is significant under Category A due to its association with the broad patterns of Spokane history particularly as the catalyst that initiated an era of community center construction in Spokane. The building is also significant under Category E due to its association with Spokane's racially and ethnically diverse East Central community and particularly with the League of Women for Community Action.



<sup>32</sup> Emry Dinman, "City Council Reconsiders Future of Former East Central Library," *Spokesman-Review*, 1/14/2023, page C1.

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- Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division, “Decennial Census Counts of Population for the State, Counties, Cities and Towns,” (Excel spreadsheet, Olympia, 2017).
- Articles of Incorporation for the League of Women for Community Action, Washington Secretary of State, Washington State Digital Archives.
- Carol Shook, letter to City of Spokane regarding East Central Community Center renaming and historic designation,” 7/1/2019.
- Agreements between the City of Spokane and the League of Women for Community Action, City of Spokane Public Records Database, 2/27/1980 and 9/25/1980.

### Historic Register Nominations and Surveys

- East Central Historic Context and Survey, Logan Camporeale, Spokane Historic Preservation Office, 2022-2023

### Books, Films, Maps, and Architectural Drawings

- Spokane Public Schools, *First Class for 100 Years*, “Edison School,” page 26.
- Seyler, Warren, Ben Adkisson, *Spokane Tribal Wars of 1858*, directed by Trask McFarland (2017; Wellpinit, WA: VariusMedia), <https://youtu.be/-uN2juBAK1c>.

SECTION 12: ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

## Social Action Success

The League of Women for Community Action is planning a "celebration" Saturday morning along with the last of 10 community meetings on a wide range of social and political topics.

The meeting will involve a potluck lunch and entertainment, beginning at 10 a.m. at the old Edison School, S515 Lee.

The success of the meetings is to be "celebrated," and there will be a groundbreaking ceremony for the East Central Neighborhood Center to be constructed on the school site, according to

Lee Wade, project director.

The previous meetings, which are to be reviewed, involved employment, housing, youth, child care, senior citizens, health care, transportation, neighborhood images and a city candidates forum. The meetings began in September.

The League of Women for Community Action is a private, non-profit organization that is supported in part by the Washington Commission for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Spokane Daily Chronicle article about the East Central Community Center groundbreaking on April 27, 1978.

## East Central Community Center opens

By JIM SMITH

Spokesman-Review staff writer

Seven years ago lamentations were heard as Edison Elementary School, S515 Lee, closed its doors forever after 81 years of classroom activity.

On Wednesday cheerful sounds were heard on the same 3.4-acre tract, as East Central Community Center opened its facilities to the scrutiny of the press, local citizens and civic dignitaries.

"A lot of us thought this day might never come," Mayor Ron Bair said in a brief program preceding tours of the facilities.

As a result of the accomplishment of "such a building as this" and other neighborhood community projects, Bair said Spokane has "become a model used by the rest of the United States."

Bair not only presented a proclamation to Mrs. Lee A. Wade, chairman of the center's steering committee, but he also signed it on the spot.

"We're not stopping. We still have things to do," Mrs. Wade said after describing the "patience and hard work" involved in the neighborhood effort begun in 1974.

Bair's proclamation made the 32-day period ending Sept. 29 "East

Central Neighborhood Community Awareness Month" in Spokane.

Actually the center opened its doors to the community June 18. The East Side Branch of the Spokane Public Library moved in and gymnasium activity began.

Most of Edison Elementary School was demolished in 1977 to prepare the way for the center.

Edison's former multipurpose unit — a \$100,000 project in the late 1960's — is incorporated into the center.

Leon F. "Skip" Rowland, the center's manager-director, said the former multipurpose unit will become a senior citizens' center.

Facilities for seniors will be completed by November, he said.

The gymnasium can seat 500 to 600 persons for a stage show or about 250 for an athletic contest, Rowland said.

The stage, with a "professional lighting system," adjoins the basketball floor, he added.

The month-long celebration will end with an outdoor party Sept. 29 on the new grass, planted near the center.

If the first 31 days' activity doesn't make the community aware of the center, Rowland said the party "will wake up some people."

Spokesman-Review article announcing the grand opening of the East Central Community Center on August 30, 1979.

## NAACP to celebrate birthday

Spokane's branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in cooperation with East Central Community Center, will celebrate the NAACP's 76th birthday at 6:30 p.m. Saturday at the community center, S500 Stone.

The event will include a panel discussion, "The NAACP in the '80s: Action or Procrastination."

Panelists include: the Rev. Ezra Kinlow, president, Ministerial Alliance; Samuel Baynes, president, Spokane NAACP; Terry Kershaw, director of minority affairs at Whitworth; Al Marsh, vice president of Old National Bank; Dr.

Spokane Daily Chronicle article reporting on the 76<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of the Spokane NAACP on February 15, 1985.

## Long citizen effort successful

Behind the Spokane City Council's Monday night authorization of a call for bids to construct the East Central Neighborhood Community Center lie years of hoping on the part of area residents.

The hoping started things, but diligence and unrelenting, persistent hard work brought about their goal.

Residents met, studied and discussed, compared problems and needs and set out to make the entire city aware of what the East Central Neighborhood faced as its future, without help.

They proved their case.

The federally financed center, to be built at S515 Lee on the site of the former Edison School, will require city funds of approximately \$70,000 annually for operation and maintenance.

Community Development funds of \$1 million have been set aside for the center's construction, expected to start this spring and be completed by year's end.

To help defray costs of the center once it is complete, a list of tenants has been developed. Potential tenants are those capable of providing services such as education, health, child care, drug and alcohol counseling and treatment, housing information and referral, employment security and nutrition.

The center undoubtedly will become a gathering place for the area's young

and old alike. Counseling, entertainment, fellowship and socialization will now have a "headquarters" in the neighborhood. In addition, many residents talk of arts and crafts, films, ceramics and sewing.

Other community centers are planned in Spokane; West Central Neighborhood is expected to make application, and a Hillyard group is considering the possibility.

East Central Neighborhood has provided an excellent example. Its determined, hard-working residents could be considered inspiring pathfinders for those in other parts of the city.

The alternative to community centers is kids with nowhere to go but the streets, and oldsters with no place to go and no one with whom to talk.

**Summary: East Central Neighborhood deserves its center, and its residents deserve congratulations for good citizenship and responsibility.**



Spokesman Review article commenting on the importance of the citizen initiative to get the center built on February 8, 1978.

# Spokane

Spokane Chronicle  
Saturday, Jan. 30, 1982  
Page 3

## Maya Angelou: Walking proud, head unbowed

JENNIFER WILLIAMSON  
Of the Chronicle

Maya Angelou's first words to her audience — more than 300 of all ages and colors, seated, standing and squatted on the floor — were a poem.

*"She does not know her beauty  
She thinks her brown body has no glory  
If she could dance naked under  
palm trees  
And see her image in the river  
she would know  
But there are no palm trees in  
the streets  
And dishwasher gives back no im-  
ages."*

A look deep into the contents of that poem, "No Images," written by a black poet in the 1930s, shows "what happens to a person or a people or a gender . . . or a nation of people who believe that they have no worth." Ms. Angelou said at a program last night at the East Central Community Center, kicking off Black History Month in February.

"When they believe it," she said, "when they have been forced, encouraged to believe it by a larger, more powerful outer society which also believes it, one sees a rot set in."

Ms. Angelou, who played Kunta Kinte's grandmother in the television miniseries "Roots" and has written three volumes of poetry and four autobiographical novels, gave dramatic presentations of her work for nearly an hour while her audience sat spellbound, drinking in every word. Her every utterance, whether a poem or not, had a riveting cadence to it and every syllable was brought home with a gesture or movement.

"There are no better words to describe her message than her own. Despite the phrase in the black community that black is beautiful," she said, "one still hears today in 1982 phrases such as 'He's dark but he's nice looking' or 'She's light but she doesn't have good hair,' meaning not European."

"What really brings it to the point is that we are obliged, in 1982, to have a Black History Month." Ms. Angelou said. "Doesn't that tell you something?"

"The first blacks were brought here in 1619. That's one year before the Mayflower docked . . . Yet here we are, 350 plus years later, saying it's okay to be black. Isn't that strange? Doesn't that make you wonder?"

Ms. Angelou, who has traveled the globe, including a period when she was married to a South African freedom fighter and lived in Egypt, serving as associate editor of the only English language news weekly in the Middle East, said it is "appalling" that Europeans know more about black history than most Americans do.

"In this country," she said, "black Americans have been obliged for centuries to laugh when we weren't tickled and to scratch when we didn't itch. And those gestures have come down to us as Uncle Tomming . . ."

"We don't often enough stop to wonder how that black man's throat was closing on him when he said 'yassuh, boss, you right, I'm stupid' so he could make enough money to come home and feed me," she said.

"Now, obviously, those people were successful in the employment of those ploys or many of you wouldn't be here to listen to me, who wouldn't be here to talk to you this evening," Ms. Angelou said.

That explanation led perfectly into a presentation of Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem, "We Wear the Mask," and the murmurs of appreciation and generous applause that followed were indications that the audience, while having heard the poem before, perhaps had never before really understood it.

Maya Angelou's poems have an underlying theme of love, often a healthy, black self-love, and she used poetry last night to talk about love. "I mean that quality, that condition so powerful that it builds bridges," she said.

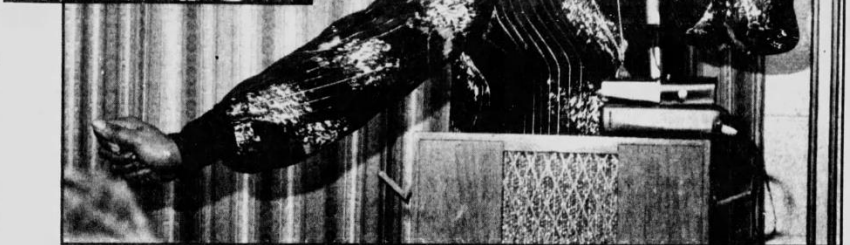
An audience favorite was "Phenomenal Woman" — every phrase described Ms. Angelou perfectly, particularly:

*"Now you understand  
Just why my head's not bowed.  
I don't shout or jump about  
Or have to talk real loud.  
When you see me passing it  
ought to make you proud."*



"I would like to be remembered as a person who dared to love and who loved my work as well as people."

— Poet Maya Angelou



WES CAMERON of the Chronicle

After four standing ovations, Ms. Angelou offered a brief question and answer session. "Don't hesitate to ask me anything," she said. "I have been known to answer questions I didn't even understand." One of the questions she was asked was how she would like to be remembered. There was only a moment's hesitation. "I would like to be remembered as a person who dared to love and who loved my work as well as people," she said.

Ms. Angelou's program was sponsored by the Eastern Washington University Black Education Program. Other scheduled events for Black History Month, themed

- ✓ Feb. 2 — EWU's Black Education Program presents a film, "New Mood," in the PUB at 12:30 p.m.
- ✓ Feb. 8 — Spokane Mayor James Chase speaks at Fairchild Air Force Base in the Deal Recreation Center at 8 a.m., followed by a slide presentation on Spokane black history at 10 a.m., an art exhibit from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., a pot luck from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and a panel discussion on "Blueprints for Survival" from 2 to 3 p.m.
- ✓ Feb. 9 — Mrs. Eleanor Chase, wife of Spokane's mayor, speaks at 11 a.m., followed by a dinner at noon and a movie at 1 p.m.
- ✓ Feb. 10 — Fairchild offers a soul food dinner from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. with Joyce Bobbitt, a member of the School District 81 board, as speaker, along with an art display and movies at the base hospital.
- ✓ Feb. 11 — Fairchild hosts a presentation from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Preschool and Child Care Center, followed by a fine arts presentation and disco at the Deal Recreation Center from 8 p.m. to midnight.
- ✓ Feb. 12 — Fairchild presents a black history dinner at 6:30 p.m., a fashion show at 8:30 p.m., and a dance at the NCO club at 10 p.m.
- ✓ Feb. 13 — Delta Sigma Theta presents a Founder's Day Lunch and a Peppermint Ball, both at the Stratton-Spokane Hotel.
- ✓ Feb. 14 — Morning Star Baptist Church presents a black heritage service at 3:30 p.m. and Fairchild offers chapel fellowship at 3 p.m.
- ✓ Feb. 17 — Spokane Falls Community College presents Edwin Moses, top track runner in the 1984 U.S. Olympics, as a speaker at 11:30 a.m. in the Music Building auditorium.
- ✓ Feb. 18 — Whitworth College offers a Northwest Symposium on Black Oral History at the Lindeman Seminar Center from 7 to 10 p.m., repeated from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Feb. 19.
- ✓ Feb. 19 — St. Matthew's Baptist Church presents Mrs. Eleanor Chase as a speaker at the East Central Community Center at 7 p.m.
- ✓ Feb. 20 — Whitworth offers a Black History Month banquet at Leavitt Dining Hall.
- ✓ Feb. 21 — Morning Star Baptist Church holds the North Pacific Baptist Convention at 7 p.m.
- ✓ Feb. 23 — EWU's Black Education Program presents the film "Black Woman" in the PUB at 12:30.
- ✓ Feb. 27 — The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) presents a Black History Luncheon at the East Central Community Center, 5500 Stone, at 12:30 p.m.

Spokane Chornicle (1/30/1982) article and photo reporting on Maya Angelou's visit to the East Central Community Center.

Science Building.

**...A...P. in the '80s: Action or Procrastination" - panel discussion featuring Carl Maxey, Sam Baynes and Mrs. Lee Wade, 7 p.m., Feb. 16, East Central Community Center.**

Black history. Free videotape

Spokesman-Review advertisement (2/14/1985) announcing an NAACP program at the East Central Community Center.



### Edison Project Starts

Groundbreaking for the new \$106,962 Edison School multipurpose unit was a momentous occasion yesterday afternoon for the pupils and parents. In the foreground, left to right, are Ralph A. Redding, contractor; Mrs. Eugene Orlando, past president of the

PTA who worked for the project; Mrs. Lars A. Larson, PTA president, and Virginia B. Smith, principal. The multipurpose unit is the first step in a series that will result in replacement of the existing school, one of the oldest in the city.

Spokane Chornicle (10/6/1965) photo showing the groundbreaking for the Edison School multipurpose room.

## Day Care Centers Seen Vital to Poor

By ALDEN CROSS  
Spokesman-Review Staff Writer  
(Second of two articles)

While the main emphasis is on teaching, the Spokane Day Care Center program considers total needs of disadvantaged children it serves and, as a result, the many supportive services that are provided play an important role in preparing the child for his "regular" school years.

Spokane presently has two Day Care Centers which are agencies of the Spokane Community Action Council (CAC), the county's funding agency for Office of Economic Opportunity

funds. Three more are planned for later this year as the full-year, full-day program expands to replace the Head Start program. They will be run by School District 81, Spokane Community College and the League of Women for Community Action in southeast Spokane.

#### Services Varied

Far more than a baby sitting service for children of low-income families, Day Care Centers provide an opportunity for these youngsters to acquire some of the early learning experiences more fortunate children take for granted. Also included is a teacher's aide program. "It has been recognized

for quite some time the problem of disadvantaged children become set early in life," said Mrs. Rex West, education coordinator for the CAC. "Many of the health problems and a high degree of the dental problems appear early among these children. So do such things as speech defenct's."

#### Too Poor to Help

Because of the medical and dental problems — "which, said Mrs. West, "often result because parents cannot afford to take care of them," Day Care Centers have an extensive program in these fields.

"We have a routine screening test for all the children that includes hearing and vision along with a good medical and dental check," Mrs. West said. "We also include immunizations. If a major problem is found, we advise the parents and we have ways of providing the funds for treatment. I would like to point out that cooperation of medical authorities is outstanding. Dr. George Wood of the Dental Society has been great and so have the wives in the society's auxiliary."

#### Basic Things Taught

As part of the regular program, the children are taught such basic things as brushing their teeth and washing their hands.

Mrs. West said, "We also make sure they get a proper meal at the center that may include breakfast for those who come early. Here again is a learning experience because some of these youngsters have never been taught simple table manners."

The parents, Mrs. West said, "are caught up in the cycle of poverty. If they weren't, they would have the ability and the time to spend with their children teaching them some of these basic things."

"It is a failure of education

and society when a child of the poor goes on to become the parents of the poor and, and at the same time when the children of bigots can go on to become the parents of bigots," Mrs. West asserted.

The centers also put a strong emphasis on "involving the parents" in the centers. A social worker is required to meet each parent and continue follow-up visits.

"Parents often need help, too," said Mrs. West. "We can aid. All many of these mothers need is a change in her outlook in life. Many times the lack of proper nourishment is only a matter of the mother not knowing how to cook properly. We try to teach them."

In many cases the children at the centers are from families without fathers. The mothers are encouraged to become involved in the center on various boards or as volunteers.

#### Love, Care Abounds

"It should be pointed out that many of these youngsters receive more love and care than a lot of financially better off children," Mrs. West said. "But when these disadvantaged children reach school age they may be wearing ragged clothes or be without proper shoes. This can be a tragic thing to the child's ego. That is why we try to hard to work with parents."

The Spokane Day Care Center is headed by William Martin. He also is supervisor for the Northeast center which is operated by Mrs. Marilyn Ewing.

"I can't say enough about the staff we have," Mrs. West said. "They are not only professional in their approach but also show a tremendous amount of personal 'heart' and interest for the youngsters. With this kind of attitude, Day Care is assured of being a success in Spokane."

### AFTER DARK . . .

## Popular Ethel Ennis Back at Spokane House

By ELEANOR RUTHERFORD  
Spokesman-Review Staff Writer

Ethel Ennis, purveyor of "progressive pop" will make a return engagement to the Spokane House starting today.

Twenty years in show business including the cutting of seven albums, many of them for RCA, has made a polished, sophisticated artist out of the pert Ethel.

Born in Baltimore where she now lives with her husband, a feature writer on the "Baltimore Sun," she spends much of the time in the West. This is her seventh appearance in Spokane.

Backing her will be the Stan Keen Trio, with Stan at the piano, Noel Waters, bass, and Tom Schager, drums.

### Young Trio Offers Contemporary Song



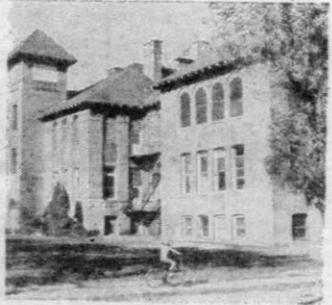
ETHEL ENNIS  
Purveyor of Pop

when a surprise headliner will appear, said David J. Erickson, sales manager of the hotel.

Spokesman-Review article (3/23/1970) explain the League of Women for Community Action mission.

**EAST CENTRAL**

As one of the two original Neighborhoods organized for Community Development, East Central has received \$1,819,000 since 1975. Unpaved streets were a large problem and 41 blocks of streets are now being paved with 50% CD Fund assistance. Social services are important in the neighborhood, and the Edison Senior Center, S.E. Daycare Center, Martin Luther King Center, Eastside Neighborhood Center, Bethel Senior Center, and others have received CD assistance. In addition, CD funds were used to open a Neighborhood Information Center with information on social services and programs. In the fall of 1978 Spokane's first Multi-Purpose Community Center will be opened at the Old Edison School site — a one million dollar project paid for with Community Development Funds. This fall work is underway to improve the restrooms in Underhill Park and a \$200,000 voluntary home rehabilitation program will begin to help low and moderate income home owners rehabilitate their homes. Chairperson Lee Wade of the East Central Neighborhood Steering Committee invites you to get involved, as residents of this active neighborhood.



ADVERTISEMENT

Advertisement in *Spokesman-Review* (9/22/1977) for the Community Development program and its impact on East Central.

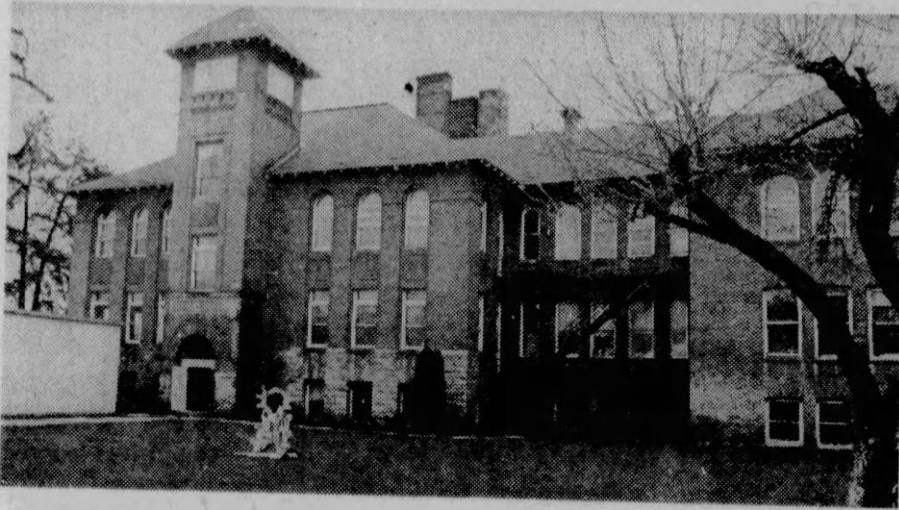


**Wreckers demolishing Edison School**

Clearing the way for the new \$1 million East Central Neighborhood Multipurpose Community Center, demolition crews by Monday had exposed the heart of the old structure which from 1893 to 1972 drew hundreds of children for classroom instruction. Closed after District 81's financial crisis five years ago, Edison School was turned over to the city Park Board for community use. 3-R

*Spokesman-Review* photo (10/4/1977) showing the Edison School being demolished.

# 9 Schools Tabbed for Closure Here




EDISON School, S515 Lee, would be closed under District 81 plans.

*Spokesman-Review* article (4/15/1972) reporting on the closure of nine elementary schools including Edison.

APP

**198815**  
FILE NUMBER

DOMESTIC



STATE OF WASHINGTON | DEPARTMENT OF STATE


I, **A. LUDLOW KRAMER**, Secretary of State of the State of Washington and custodian of its seal,  
hereby certify that

ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

of **THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN FOR COMMUNITY ACTION**

a domestic corporation of **Spokane,** Washington,

Articles of Incorporation for the League of Women for Community Action filed with the Washington Secretary of State.



**FILED**  
 FEB 27 1980  
 CITY CLERK'S OFFICE  
 SPOKANE, WASH.

Recordation

Approve  
 Deny  
 Set Hearing  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Agenda Category

Hearing  
 Report  
 Contract  
 Resolution  
 Annexation  
 Ordinance  
 Staff Report  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Date: February 27, 1980

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

For Action  
 For Information

Budget Account # OPR 93-301  
 145-20

**AGENDA WORDING**

Agreement to lease certain ground on the East Central Community Center Site to the League of Women for Community Action for a Day Care Center.

**BACKGROUND**

Last Monday Council approved the Application for Community Development Funding to the League of Women for Community Action for a Day Care Center. This lease will lease to the League, the ground needed to build the Center. After the Center is built, the League will donate the building to the City and the City will lease the building back to the League.

The lease is a no cost (\$1.00/year) agreement with a 50 year term plus a 50 year renewal option. The League of Women for Community Action has full responsibility for all operations and maintenance costs, and for programming use of the facility. Commercial uses are not permitted. Termination of the lease by the City may be made only through breach of contract action.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

ATTACHMENTS: (list)

[Signature] Lease  
 Submitting Department  
VPCALL etc  
 Manager (Finance, Admin., Engineering or Planning)

[Signature] Legal

Finance

[Signature] City Manager

**FINAL DISPOSITION**

APPROVED & ADOPTED BY  
 SPOKANE CITY COUNCIL:  
 MAR 03 1980  
[Signature]  
 CITY CLERK

**DISTRIBUTION**

Planning   
 Legal   
 Public Utility

21

FORM #568

1980 Spokane City Council Contract to make the League of Women for Community Action the ECCC lease holder.

FORM 412 (Revised) 6450 Plan 508 BUILDING DIVISION Permit No. B 61893

Address South 515 Lee Street Date 10-19-65

Lot \_\_\_\_\_ Blk \_\_\_\_\_ Addition \_\_\_\_\_

Group \_\_\_\_\_ Type \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ File Zone \_\_\_\_\_

Owner School District #81 Address West 825 Trent

Contractor R. Peeling Construction Address East 3604 Garnet

Architect James & Hicks Address O.N.B. Building

New  Alteration \_\_\_\_\_ Repair \_\_\_\_\_ Addition \_\_\_\_\_ Demolish \_\_\_\_\_

Use of New Bldg. Multi-Purpose Unit Use of Ex. Bldg. Edison School

Area Approx. 6000sq. ft. Stories 1 No. Rooms \_\_\_\_\_ No. Units \_\_\_\_\_

Garage \_\_\_\_\_ Chimney (gas vent) \_\_\_\_\_

VALUE \$ 95000.00

[Signature] Final Approval [Signature] Inspector

City of Spokane Building Permit for the 1965 multipurpose room that was added on to Edison School.