

FOURTEENTH WARD INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, 256-258 Mott Street, Borough of Manhattan, Built 1888-1889; architects, Vaux & Radford.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 508, Lot 6.

On May 10, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Fourteenth Ward Industrial School and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Fourteenth Ward Industrial School, often referred to as the Astor Memorial School, was built in 1888-89 for the Children's Aid Society. A striking example of Victorian Gothic architecture, it was designed by the architectural firm of Vaux & Radford and is one of a series of buildings by the firm for the Children's Aid Society.

Beginning in the early 19th century, immigration to America from Europe increased rapidly. Many people came from the poorest, most degraded districts in the larger European cities. Many others, coming from remote rural areas, were unlettered. Reaching America via the gates of Ellis Island, they remained in their port of entry, New York City. Slums rapidly developed. Many of the poor were unable to care for their children; thousands were thrown out to survive upon their own resources and wandered the streets as vagrants. With no protective legislation and no compulsory education, these children remained totally neglected. Some peddled matches, apples or newspapers. Others gathered bones or rags from the streets to sell. Many lived by begging, petty pilfering, or crime. The older girls were often forced to turn to prostitution in order to survive. These children slept on steps, in cellars or old barns, or hired beds in cheap lodging houses. Jacob Riis described them as "homeless children--street arabs who lived in the streets, slept in alleys, and scrounged for food from pushcarts until they grew old enough to join the army of thieves and crooks."

In 1853, Charles Loring Brace founded the Children's Aid Society, the first organization established in this country to better the living conditions of indigent children. Brace, a minister by training, had traveled in the large cities of Europe where he had seen the effects of poverty on people's lives. He determined that it was possible to give poor children the opportunity to lead productive lives and set as his goal the achievement of that end. The Society existed to serve the "large multitude of children who cannot be placed in asylums and yet who are uncared for and ignorant and vagrant." In March 1853, he wrote:

This Society has taken its origin in the deeply settled feelings of our citizens, that something must be done to meet the increasing crime and poverty among the destitute children of New York.

Its objects are to help this class, by opening Sunday meetings and Industrial Schools and gradually, as means shall be furnished, by forming Lodging Houses and Reading Rooms for children and by employing paid agents, whose sole business shall be to care for them.

In 1854, the Society opened its first lodging house for news-boys and bootblacks in a loft in the old "Sun Building". The boys paid six cents per night, each receiving a bed, food, a shower, as well as moral encouragement. By 1871, the Society's properties included five lodging houses and twenty-two industrial schools scattered in different districts of the city. The earlier institutions had been located in a series of small houses in various sections of the city which had been pressed into service for this purpose. Before the end of the century, nearly all of these older buildings had been replaced by newer, larger, more modern ones built specifically for the Society's use.

The majority of these new buildings, erected between 1879 and 1892, were designed by the firm of Vaux & Radford. These buildings comprise a clearly identifiable series. They are described in the Real Estate Record and Guide in an article of 1888, attributed by Dennis S. Francis to Montgomery Schuyler, the noted architectural critic;

The buildings erected in different parts of the city for the use of that excellent and most useful organization, the Children's Aid Society, are, for the most part, of real interest as works of architecture as well as monuments of a noble charity.

It is a fortunate circumstance that the objects of the Children's Aid Society require it to undertake its building operations in quarters where, but for its efforts, it is unlikely that there would be any architecture worth looking at or discussing.

The buildings designed by Vaux & Radford fall into two distinct stylistic groups. The earlier group--the East Side Boys Lodging House (1880), 287 Broadway; the West Side Boys Lodging House and Industrial School (1884), 400 Seventh Avenue; and the Tompkins Square Boys Lodging House and Industrial School (1886), 295 East 8th Street--was designed in the English Gothic manner. All were situated on corner sites, rising four and one half stories, with massive chimneys, dormered roofs, and simple details.

While traveling in Europe, Charles Loring Brace had been very impressed with the Petersen building, a 16th century house in Nuremberg. He sent accurate drawings of the building to the architects in America and impressed upon them his wish that their future designs for the Children's Aid Society should reflect this building. As a result, the later Children's Aid Society buildings--the Forty Fourth Street Lodging House and Industrial School for Boys (1888), 247 East 44th Street, six new industrial schools, the House of Refuge, and a single girls' lodging house--show the influence of this Nuremberg building. Red brick, molded brick, and terra cotta were used for these

buildings with stepped gable fronts reminiscent of the early Dutch architecture of Manhattan Island. This feature had already appeared in the Tompkins Square Lodging House of 1886. The Forty Fourth Street building (no longer standing) was the first of the type, based on the Petersen building, to be constructed.

The Fourteenth Ward Industrial School, 256-258 Mott Street, was built to replace a school on Crosby Street which had been in existence since 1853. This school served the needs of the poor in the large Italian community in the neighborhood. The new building was donated by John Jacob Astor as a memorial to his wife, a longtime supporter of the activities of the Society. The Annual Report of the Children's Aid Society for 1888 states:

The other building, founded by Mr. J.J. Astor as a memorial to Mrs. Astor, at No. 256-258 Mott Street, is also near its completion. In erecting this beautiful monument to his wife...Mr. Astor,, furnished the means both for the lots and the building, or about \$63,000. Miss Steven's school, mainly of Italian children in Crosby Street, in which Mrs.Astor had so deep an interest, as well as in the Italian poor, will be transferred to the building during the present winter, as soon as it is thoroughly completed. The architecture,,,does even more credit to Mr. Vaux's genius than the building in Fourty (sic)-fourth Street. In the midst of a poor and crowded street, a building with air and light, and of beautiful proportions, has been erected, which will be a perpetual joy to the poor Italian children, and as a means of education and charity for generations to come.

The Fourteenth Ward Industrial School, also known as the Astor Memorial School, was the first Children's Aid Society structure planned solely as a school; earlier buildings had combined classroom and lodging house facilities. Dedicated in March, 1889, it was utilized by the Children's Aid Society as an industrial and night school until 1913 when a larger structure was built on the corner of Elizabeth and Hester Streets. The New York Association for the Improvement of the Conditions of the Poor then leased and later purchased the building, renaming it the Mulberry Community Center. As the Mulberry Community Center it provided, among other services, dietary and dental clinics, English language classes and assembly areas for local residents. More recently the building was remodeled for industrial use, and it was sold in 1972 to the Fourteenth Ward Industrial Building, Inc., for conversion into cooperative apartments. Currently the building is undergoing renovation.

According to Dennis Francis, an authority on Calvert Vaux, the building can be considered the result of a close working relationship between architect and client. Vaux, a master of the use of carved stone, terra cotta, and molded brick, was responsible for the general design. Radford, the engineer, was in charge on the site. Brace, the Secretary of the Society, provided the stylistic inspiration and awarded the commission. Radford had been announced first as the architect for the project, and he signed the building permit applications for the firm.

Calvert Vaux (1824-1895), the architect of the school, was born in England and educated there. In the early 1850s he came to New York City and worked in the office of the eminent landscape architect, Andrew Jackson Downing, later becoming his partner in Newburgh-on-Hudson. After the death of Downing in 1852, Vaux returned to New York and became associated with Frederick Law Olmsted. At Vaux's initiative, the two devised a plan for Central Park. They remained associated for a number of other park designs in Manhattan and Brooklyn. In conjunction with these designs, Vaux was also the architect for several structures in Central and Prospect Parks. In addition to Downing and Olmsted, Vaux also was associated during his career with F.C. Withers, Jacob Wrey Mould, Lewis W. Leeds, Samuel Parsons Jr., and George Kent Radford.

Radford, born in England and a civil engineer by training, collaborated with Vaux on the buildings for the Children's Aid Society. His work with Vaux began in 1872, shortly after the dissolution of Olmsted, Vaux & Co., landscape architects. Radford was an engineer and the designer of the structural elements of many of Vaux's buildings, including the Jefferson Market Courthouse, and the original buildings (now with a number of additions), of the American Museum of Natural History, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1876, Vaux and Radford entered into a formal partnership. Among their best work was the 1881 remodeling of the Gramercy Park houses of S.J. Tilden, now known as the National Arts Club.

In 1880, Vaux returned to the practice of landscape architecture and Vaux & Radford became the architectural branch of Vaux & Company, landscape architects. The firm, originally located at 71 Broadway, moved in 1883 to Bible House. No projects are attributed to it after 1893, and the partnership apparently dissolved without any publicity.

The Fourteenth Ward Industrial School, four stories high with a basement, is constructed of selected common and pressed Philadelphia brick, laid with red mortar and trimmed with Gatelaw Bridge stone (a light brown sandstone) and terra-cotta ornamental panels. Vaux's predilection for using such rich polychromatic materials was well-known. In 1879, he wrote: "I am in favor of brick, molded brick, and colored brick. There is no nobler material". The facade is flanked by buttresses and the stories are separated by narrow string courses. The building is entered through an impressive projecting elliptical-arched opening at the ground floor. The corners of the brick piers on either side of the doorway have rope-molded colonnettes with diminutive capitals; the tops of the piers display rows of Tudor roses. The arch is surmounted by a picturesque shouldered gable flanked by scroll-type bases with incised foliate ornament. At the top of the gable a terra-cotta panel with the initials of the Children's Aid Society set in foliate ornament surmounts a carved inscription with the name of the school.

Dominating the facade is a three-sided centrally-placed oriel, set on a convex sandstone corbel, which extends up through the second and third stories. Foliate terra-cotta panels beneath the windows and wide sandstone lintels above them provide contrast with the red brickwork of the oriel. Transoms above the double-hung sash windows once had stained glass. Beneath

the oriel are two narrow windows with corbeled heads that are set behind and appear integral with the sandstone corbel at the base of the oriel. Segmental arched windows with brick arches flank the oriel. At the first floor an elaborate foliate terra-cotta plaque is placed beneath the arch in place of a transom, while the upper floors have transoms which are filled with clear glass. Small bands of decorative tile are set directly beneath the third floor windows.

The fourth story is crowned by an impressive crow-stepped gable. Small brick finials with ornamental arched stone caps adorn the center and the ends. The pitch of the gable is defined by a saw tooth string course which is just below the crow steps. A central arched window in the gable has elaborate ornament in the arch and is flanked by two small windows at each side, the blind heads of which conform in slope to the pitch of the gable. This is the only one of the Children's Aid Society buildings which retains its original stepped gable.

A foliate terra-cotta plaque with the initials "C.A.S.", (for Children's Aid Society) is a prominent feature at the apex of the gable. The Astors, the donors of the building, are also commemorated in the ornamentation, with a large terra-cotta plaque with the letter "A" above the entrance, and a small carved roundel, also with the letter "A" placed below the corbel of the oriel.

This building is closely related in design to the earlier Children's Aid Society buildings which had been built on corner sites. For this reason the building has a secondary facade facing an accessway which is now partially obscured by a newer, taller building to the south. This facade with swelled profile has windows at each floor which are similar in detail to those on the front. A series of dormers is set at the roofline; the most prominent of which is turret-like in appearance with hexagonal roof.

In its overall conception the building is a striking example of the Victorian Gothic style which was so skillfully practiced by Vaux. The polychromy of the design and the elaborate foliate ornament are also characteristic of the style. Even such German Renaissance features as the crow-stepped gable and the centrally placed two-story oriel have been translated by Vaux and Radford into the Victorian Gothic idiom. In addition, the building remains a worthy symbol of the work of the Children's Aid Society, an organization which has helped so many children since its founding in 1853.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Fourteenth Ward Industrial School has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Fourteenth Ward Industrial School (Astor Memorial

School) is a striking example of Victorian Gothic architecture, that it was designed by the architectural firm of Vaux & Radford as one of a series of buildings by the firm for the Children's Aid Society, that the building was donated by John Jacob Astor as a memorial to his wife, a longtime supporter of the activities of the Children's Aid Society, and that it remains a worthy symbol of the work of the Children's Aid Society.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Fourteenth Ward Industrial School, 256-258 Mott Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 508, Lot 6, Borough of Manhattan, as **its** Landmark Site.