

PUBLIC SCHOOL 9 ANNEX, 251 Sterling Place, Borough of Brooklyn, Built 1895;  
James W. Naughton, Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 1165, Lot 1.

On November 15, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Public School 9 Annex, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Public School 9 Annex, built in 1895, is a large and imposing brick and sandstone building designed with a combination of Romanesque Revival and classical features. Standing on the northeast corner of Sterling Place and Vanderbilt Avenue in Prospect Heights, the building is directly across Vanderbilt Avenue from the original Public School 9 (now P.S.111). There had been a great community effort to save the Annex building and it now functions as the center for many neighborhood activities.

In the 1890s, Prospect Heights was developing into an attractive residential section. Handsome Romanesque Revival and neo-Classical rowhouses were being built on the blocks east of Vanderbilt Avenue and important civic improvements were taking place along the southern boundary of the area, Eastern Parkway. One of these improvements was the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. Known today as the Brooklyn Museum, which stands on Eastern Parkway at Washington Avenue, it was designed by McKim, Mead & White in 1893-94. At the Grand Army Plaza, major work was undertaken that transformed Olmsted & Vaux' simple landscaped entrance to Prospect Park into a plaza of monumental grandeur and dignity that is unequalled in New York. These civic improvements, the area's proximity to downtown Brooklyn, and the convenient public transportation to the ferries and lower Manhattan contributed to the growth of the area and its increase in population. This growth, however, taxed the facilities that Public School 9 (now P.S. 111) had provided for the section since it opened in 1868. In 1895, the Annex was built to meet the demands of the new population.

The grand design of the Annex with its elaborate combination of late Romanesque Revival and classical elements is in marked contrast to the simple style of Public School 9 (now P.S. 111) and may have been an attempt by the architect, James Naughton, to maintain the dignity of the classical style which had been used for the other civic improvements just south of the school along Eastern Parkway.

James W. Naughton (1840-98), born in Ireland, was brought to Brooklyn by his parents at the age of eight. He received his early education in the public and private schools of Brooklyn. At the age of fifteen, Naughton went west settling in Milwaukee, where he worked as an apprentice in the architectural office of J. & A. Douglas. In 1859, having completed his apprenticeship, he entered the University of Wisconsin at Madison to study architecture. After two years, he returned to Brooklyn and continued studying architecture at Cooper Union in Manhattan. He was active in Brooklyn politics and for two years, between 1874 and 1876, he served as Superintendent of Buildings for the City of Brooklyn. He succeeded Samuel B. Leonard as Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education for the City of Brooklyn in 1879 and held that position for nearly twenty years until his death in 1898. All the schools built in Brooklyn during this period were designed by Naughton. Two of his finest and best known buildings are Girls' High School (1887) and Boys' High School (1891), a designated New York City Landmark.

Set above a high rusticated basement, the Annex is three stories high and crowned by gabled dormers. The building is planned in the form of the letter "H" with the rear, northern section narrower than the main entrance section that faces Sterling Place.

The entrance facade, with sandstone basement and first floor and brick walls above, is handsomely detailed. Above the basement, the first floor has tall square-headed windows and is surmounted by a wide bandcourse, ornamented with a geometric pattern, set below a deep cornice which extends around the entire building. The focus of this entrance facade is the central bay where the round-arched entrance is flanked by paired columns. The large arch of the entrance is embellished with a heavy foliate keystone, while at either side stone corbels support a heavy carved cornice slab. Directly above the entrance, a pair of round-arched windows, flanked by short columns with cushion capitals, is surmounted by raised archivolt with carved keystones and bosses. The third and attic stories of the entrance bay are vertically joined within a single unit, flanked by engaged fluted columns which terminate at the level of the handsome modillioned roof cornice. Short unfluted columns are set in turn upon these taller ones and extend to the top of the central bay which is crowned by a gable. Within this unit, the windows are enframed by colonnettes supporting a large round arch with keystone. A pair of square-headed windows with transoms at the third story contrasts with the large round-arched window above. A spandrel panel with an ornamental terra-cotta medallion separates these two windows.

At either side of the central bay on the second and third floors, the three tiers of windows -- square-headed at the second story, round-arched above -- are vertically joined by two-story high colonnettes with capitals. These colonnettes, of medieval inspiration, carry arches similar to those at the second story of the central bay. Carved terra-cotta medallions ornament the spandrels between these windows, while stone enframements, keyed to the brickwork, further enrich this part of the facade. The large dormers above these sections are composed of two square-headed windows with a common transom. Engaged columns flank these windows and a gable crowns each dormer. Brick double chimneys have stone quoins and arched openings. They are located at either end of the central section and enhance the rich roofline of the Annex.

The end pavilions of this facade are designed with distinctly classical elements in contrast to the Romanesque Revival character of the central section. The pavilions, which are two windows wide and three windows deep along the sides, are flanked by two-story high fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals. The square-headed windows of the second floor have lintels carried on small brackets and enframements keyed to the brickwork with richly detailed terra-cotta shafts flanking the windows. This theme recurs at the third floor round-arched windows. Dormers, smaller than those at the central section, are set above the handsome modillioned roof cornice. The three windows at each floor of the side facades of the pavilions are identical to those of the front except that the end windows of the second and third floors are distinguished by flanking two-story high pilasters with Corinthian capitals. A single dormer, like those of the central section on Sterling Place, crowns the facade.

The deeply recessed middle section that connects the front and rear portions of the Annex has a flat roof and is pierced by tall, narrow square-headed windows. A handsome stone balustrade above the modillioned roof cornice crowns this section. The narrow rear portion of the school is Romanesque Revival in style with a round-arched ground floor entrance. The upper floors are pierced by narrow square-headed windows with stone mullions; the one above the door has a transom bar. At the top floor, there are large round-arched triple windows. A parapet wall enhanced by panels and balustrade rises above the narrow roof cornice.

The Public School 9 Annex which has for so long been an important part of the community continues to play a vital role in the neighborhood. Although the building no longer functions as a school, the Prospect Height residents have converted it to serve a number of purposes to meet the modern needs of the people of the area and by so doing have given new life to an old and valued feature of this part of Brooklyn.

#### 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 Public School 9 Annex 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 Public School 9 Annex is a most imposing building, that the style of the building combines Romanesque Revival and classical elements, that the brickwork is enriched with handsome stone and terra-cotta detail, that the Annex is a fine example of the work of James W. Naughton, architect for the Board of Education, that the school has played an important role in the community, that, although no longer serving as a school, it has been converted to meet the current needs of the area and that the building continues to be a significant part of the community.

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 Public School 9 Annex, 251 Sterling Place, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1165, Lot 1, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.