

PUBLIC SCHOOL 111, 249 Sterling Place, Borough of Brooklyn, Built 1867-68; Samuel B. Leonard, Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education; additions 1887.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 1164, Lot 57.

On November 15, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Public School 111, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). 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 111 has been a neighborhood institution in the Prospect Heights section of Brooklyn for one hundred and ten years. Prominently sited at the northwest corner of Sterling Place and Vanderbilt Avenue near Grand Army Plaza, it is a handsome brick school building in the early Romanesque Revival, or round-arched, style. When the building opened in 1868 it was known as Public School 9.

In 1661, the Town of Breukelen organized a free public school system. This system was abolished shortly after the English took control of New Amsterdam in 1664. It was not until 1795 that New York State passed an act for "the encouragement of schools" which provided for appropriations from the State Treasury for education. In 1843, a law was enacted which established the Brooklyn Board of Education.

The school, which later became known as Public School 9, was first established in the early 1830s; the building stood on a site which was later incorporated into Prospect Park. The present building, which is just a block away from Grand Army Plaza, was begun in 1867, a year after the construction of Prospect Park and the Plaza was initiated. The Prospect Heights area around the school began to be developed with rows of brownstone houses at about the same time. When Public School 9 officially opened in September, 1868, Mrs. Jane Dunkley was named as principal. She was the first woman appointed in Brooklyn to preside over a large grammar school.

Public School 9 (the present P.S. 111) was designed by Samuel B. Leonard, the Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn for nearly twenty years until 1879. Among the many other schools designed by Leonard is Public School 39, Brooklyn, a designated New York City Landmark. Public School 34 in Greenpoint, also designed by Leonard and built in 1867, is very similar in character to Public School 9. Additions to the school were made in 1887 by James W. Naughton, Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education from 1879 to 1898. Naughton also designed the handsome Boys' High School, a designated New York City Landmark.

By 1895 the growth in the school population necessitated the construction of the Public School 9 Annex across the street at 251 Sterling Place. Sometime thereafter Public School 9 was renamed Public School 111. Although no longer a grammar school, Public School 111 continues to be used as a special high school.

The school building is a fine example of the early Romanesque Revival style which was introduced to the United States in Richard Upjohn's Church of the Pilgrims, Brooklyn (1844-46), and James Renwick's Smithsonian Institution (designed 1846). As described by Carroll L.V. Meeks (Art Bulletin XXV, March 1953), the style was widely used between 1846 and 1876. While often associated with church architecture, it was used for secular buildings as well. By the time Samuel B. Leonard designed a series of school buildings for the City of Brooklyn in the round-arched Romanesque Revival style, it was well established. Public School 9 (111) is one of Leonard's Romanesque Revival designs which, happily, survives.

The central, oldest portion of the school building is gable-fronted and two stories high. Each two-story tier of windows is enframed by a handsome brick arch. The centrally-placed entrance, approached by a flight of steps, has a handsome brownstone enframingent with detail characteristic of the Italianate style, the other round-arched style which was so popular during this period. Paneled pilasters flanking the doorway support ornate foliate brackets and an arched pediment. A tall round-arched window at the second floor above the entrance contains an arched transom with circular motif. These two central openings are flanked by shorter arched windows. Three corbeled brick arches centered beneath the gable unite the second floor windows within a single bay. The inscription "Public School 111, 1867" can be seen beneath the central arch. This central portion, which is three openings wide, is flanked by round-arched window bays which are enframed within tall round arches which rise two stories. The gable is outlined by a raking cornice which is returned as the broken lower chord of a pediment above the two flanking round-arched bays.

Flanking wings were added to the gabled section at a later date. Also two stories high, the wings contain rectangular window openings. At the first story the windows have pedimented lintels while at the second story the lintels have cap moldings. Two-story high piers flank the outermost window bays of the wings. A dentiled cornice, similar to that at the central gable, surmounts the wings which have low roofs.

On the eastern, Vanderbilt Avenue side of the building the recessed central portion is the original structure. It has triple windows at both floors, a later addition. The later flanking wings have windows and cornices like those on the wings of the Sterling Place front. Two-story high brick piers emphasize the corners of the wings. The northern transverse wing was built in two parts; the slightly recessed northernmost section was added in 1887. It has simple rectangular window openings and is surmounted by a dentiled roof cornice like that used on the earlier sections of the building.

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 111 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, Public School 111 is a handsome brick school building in the early Romanesque Revival style, that it is distinguished by round arches executed in brick and fine architectural detail, that it is one of few school buildings in this once popular style to survive, and that it has been neighborhood institution in the Prospect Heights section of Brooklyn for one hundred and ten years.

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 111, 249 Sterling Place, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1164, Lot 57, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.